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PLAYS OF
G. MARTÍNEZ SIERRA

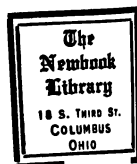
VOL. I

IN ENGLISH VERSIONS BY
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GREGORIO MARTÍNEZ SIERRA

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PLAYS OF G. MARTÍNEZ SIERRA

Volume I

THE CRADLE SONG

(Canción de Cuna)

THE LOVER

(El Enamorado)

LOVE MAGIC

(Hechizo de Amor)

POOR JOHN

(El Pobrecito Juan)

MADAME PEPITA

IN ENGLISH VERSIONS BY
JOHN GARRETT UNDERHILL

WITH A CRITICAL APPRE-
CIATION OF THE PLAYS BY
H. GRANVILLE BARKER



NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
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1922

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FOREWORD

Born at Madrid March 6, 1881, Gregorio Martínez Sierra is the youngest of the established writers for the Spanish stage. Before everything precocious in talent, his mind moves instinctively toward a graceful adjustment with its environment. He was educated at Madrid, where he attended the University, coming to grief in history, doubtless, as he says, because of a settled aversion to battles. During his early teens he had already written much and freely, so that he promptly abandoned all thought of academic preferment with this initial reverse and turned to literature as a career.

At seventeen, with the manuscript of his first book, *El poema del trabajo* ("The Song of Labor"), he presented himself to Jacinto Benavente, who furnished an introduction to the volume, and arranged its publication, which took place in 1898. A series of prose poems, or pastels, as they were called in that day followed, collected under various titles, and in 1900 his earliest short story, *Almas ausentes*, was awarded the prize in a contest conducted by the *Biblioteca Mignon*. This and other tales of the sort, subsequently appearing separately, have been reprinted in two volumes, *Abril melancólico* ("Melancholy April"), and *El diablo se ríe* ("The Devil Laughs"). His most notable work in the shorter form, however, is contained in *Sol de la tarde*, or "Declining Sun," which established his reputation beyond cavil in 1904. To the same year belongs the first of two novels, "The Humble Truth," while a second and more popular venture in the field of fiction, "Peace" (*Tú eres la paz*), was completed three years later.

In the beginning an intellectual by temperament and a

word-painter by inclination, Martínez Sierra may be characterized as an impressionist, well-versed in the procedure of the modern French schools. Perhaps the principal personal influence of his formative period was that of the poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, with whom he kept bachelor hall at Madrid. Other associations of these days were likewise predominantly literary, and leaders of the modern movement such as Antonio and Manuel Machado and the Catalan, Santiago Rusiñol, painter of gardens, proved themselves kindred spirits. Under their friendly stimulus, he published a volume of verse, *La casa de la primavera*, a chance excursion into an alien domain, as well as a prose poem upon "Hamlet in the Person of Sarah Bernhardt." With these works his "Dream Theatre" may be coupled, a quartet of symbolic, mystical dialogues with pronounced Maeterlinckian tendencies.

The first decade of the productivity of Martínez Sierra suggests little of the theatre. It was quietistic in feeling, essentially contemplative, a communion with idyllic and elegiac poets. Yet through these days another influence had been active, although less conspicuously, which in the end was to prove decisive. In the year immediately following the publication of "The Song of Labor," the Art Theatre was founded at Madrid by Benavente. The coöperation of the more promising of the younger generation was enlisted, among whom was Martínez Sierra, who played the rôle of Manuel in support of Benavente in the latter's comedy "A Long Farewell" at the opening performance. The ensuing months were months of intimate association with a remarkable mind. "As I listened to him talk, the fundamental laws of the modern theatre were revealed to me, and I have profited by his instruction unceasingly." So, properly, Martínez Sierra had already served an apprenticeship in the theatre before he began to write plays. His début as a playwright was delayed for ten years, and was then made in collaboration with Rusiñol, with whom

he composed a comedy entitled *Vida y dulzura*, presented at the Teatro de la Comedia, Madrid, in 1907. This was followed by *Aucells de pas*, also in collaboration with Rusiñol, produced in Catalan at Barcelona in 1908, and, after a further interval of two years, by *Cors de dona*, in Catalan by the same hands. Meanwhile, during the spring of 1909, Martínez Sierra attained his first independent success with the comedy in two acts, *La sombra del padre*, presented at the Lara Theatre, one of the favorite houses of the capital. *El ama de la casa*, ("The Mistress of the House,"), was acted at the same theatre in 1910, and in 1911 he achieved a definitive and permanent triumph with the production of "The Cradle Song," (*Canción de cuna*). A companion piece *Los pastores*, ("The Two Shepherds"), was brought out in 1913, also at the Lara. As Martínez Sierra's non-dramatic prose becomes most nicely expressive, most pictorial and most imaginative in *Sol de la tarde*, his comedy attains perfection in these beautiful idyls of the religious life. Radiant with the bland charm and luminosity of the Andalusian sketches of the Quinteros, these comedies possess, nevertheless, a quality which is distinctive and personal, at once richer and humanly more significant than the work of any competitors in the *genre*. No other plays convey so convincingly, or with equal grace, the implications of environment as it interprets itself in terms of character, not symbolically nor in any didactic way, but directly and visually so that the ambient becomes the protagonist rather than the individual, and the spirit of the *milieu* is felt to express more clearly than words the fundamentals which condition its life.

"The Cradle Song" has been translated into many languages, and has been played and imitated widely throughout the civilized world. It was produced in English by Augustin Duncan at the Times Square Theatre, New York.

Martínez Sierra has written forty original plays which have been acted, in addition to the three composed in collab-

oration with Rusiñol. He has translated and adapted forty-seven plays, chiefly from the French, English and Catalan, besides making occasional excursions into German. Perhaps the most important translation is a five volume edition of Maeterlinck. His non-dramatic works occupy thirty volumes to which five others of translations must be added. In the intervals of composition, he established and edited *Helios*, a short-lived literary periodical, and founded and directed the *Biblioteca Renacimiento*, one of the most prosperous and progressive publishing houses of the capital. He has also edited a library of the world's classics in translation, and more recently has established a publishing house of his own, the *Biblioteca Estrella*. In 1916 he assumed the management of the Teatro Eslava, Madrid, installing there a stock company, the *Compañía Lírico-Dramática Gregorio Martínez Sierra*, for the presentation of the modern repertory, prominently featuring his own plays. Whether from the point of view of acting or of *mise en scène*, this company must be accounted one of the most complete and satisfying in the peninsula.

An artist who is subjected continually to the distractions of business, sacrifices with his leisure opportunity for detachment. Already, previous to the production of *Los pastores*, Martínez Sierra had manifested a tendency to approximate the main currents of the modern popular theatre. An improviser of unusual facility, he composed the slightest of musical comedies in *Margot* and *La Tirana*; a charming light opera libretto, *Las golondrinas* ("The Swallows"), based upon an earlier play, *Aucells de pas*; grand opera in *La llama*, and the scenario of a dancing suite with music by Manuel de Falla for the gypsy *bailarina*, *Pastora Imperio*. He remade old comedies, reworked juvenilia, republished forgotten stories, and dramatised his novel *Tú eres la paz* as *Madrigal*. He contrived pantomime. The lesser plays of this miscellaneous epoch become an epitome of the activities of the contemporary Madrid stage,

broadened, however, by a thorough cosmopolitanism. They are eclectic, light-hearted, persistently optimistic, and, upon the more serious side, progressive documents considered from the sociological point of view. As he has grown older, Martínez Sierra has come to be interested not so much in the picturesque, in the life which is about to pass, as it lies inert in the present with all the remoteness of objective art, as he is in the future with its promise of the amelioration of the life which he formerly portrayed. He is an apostle of the new order, which is to be assured in his conception, through the dissemination of a wider and more complete knowledge, a more truly international culture and sympathy, a keener social consciousness, and, more precisely and immediately, through the promulgation of certain definite plans of reform. The more significant of the recent comedies, "The Kingdom of God" and *Esperanza nuestra* ("The Hope that is Ours") are indicative of this development. Although not didactic in form, they are purely social in genesis and in trend. In these maturer works, as in those of Linares Rivas and Benavente, the modern movement, which during the earlier years of the century had been predominantly intellectual and æsthetic, turns toward the practical and political sphere, and fixes its attention upon results. It is the completion of the cycle which began in 1898.

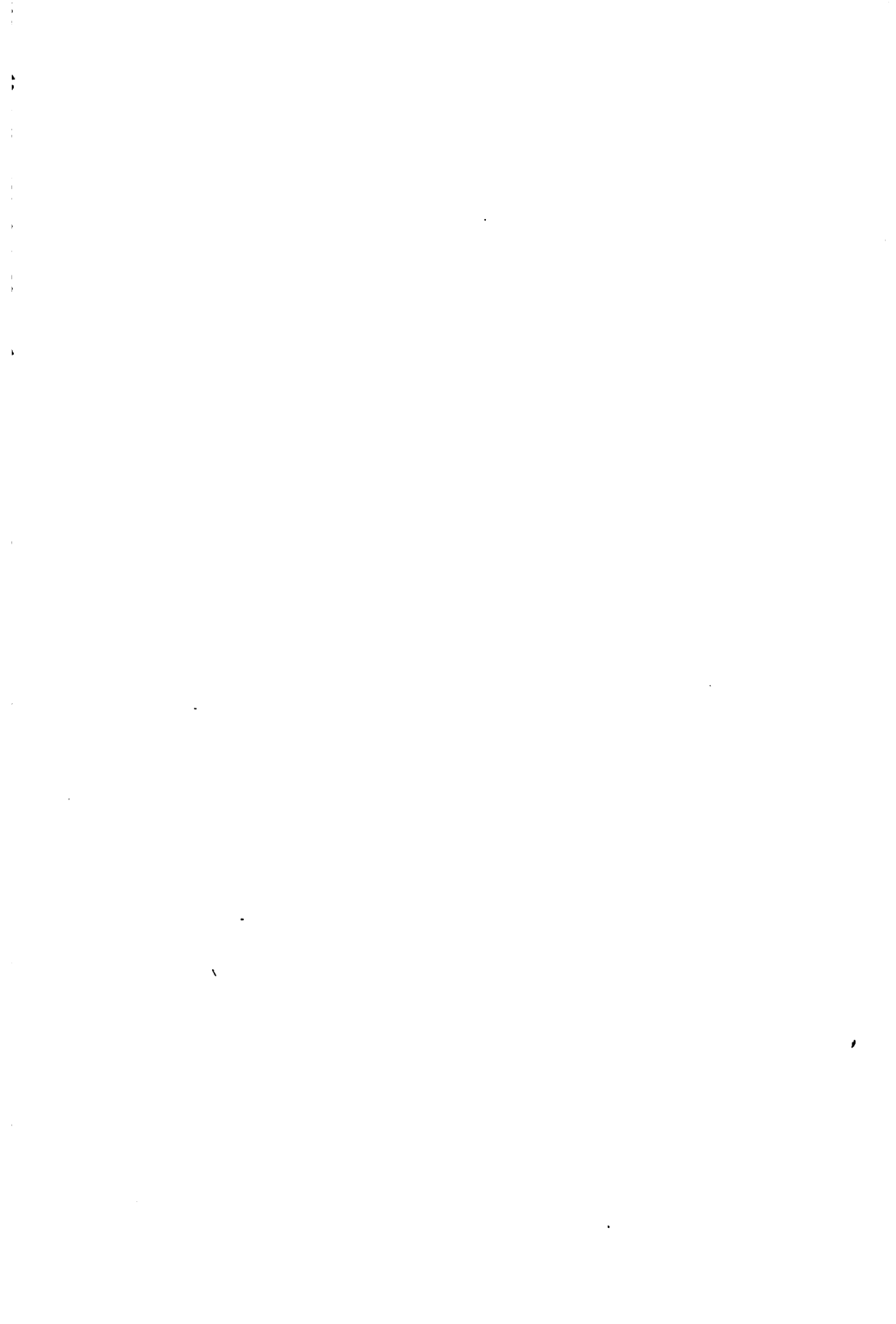
María Martínez Sierra, an accomplished writer, and one of the most brilliant women of Spain, has brought to her husband a store of feminine lore and intuition through a long series of collaborations whose precise nature and scope the most patient criticism could not hope to disclose. A woman active in the public sphere must of necessity be a revolutionary, successfully to defy the prejudices of an ancient, conventional social system. With her husband, Doña María has become a leader of the feminist movement in her country, to which their two recent volumes, "Letters to the Women of Spain" and "Feminism, Femininity and the Spanish Spirit," have been contributions of prime impor-

tance. In these books, they have placed in concrete form the spirit of their plays and set before their countrymen, the story, gathered variously and from every quarter, of a great enlightenment.

JOHN GARRETT UNDERHILL

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GREGORIO MARTÍNEZ SIERRA

While there may be much to say, there is really very little to explain about the plays of Martínez Sierra, for they have in the first place the supreme dramatic virtue of explaining themselves. They are not (those at least now under review) strikingly novel in technique. They certainly carry no abstruse philosophical message. But they are notable, the present writer holds, for simple excellence as plays, for the directness with which they set out to—and the fine economy with which they do—achieve their purpose. And what better in this sort, can be said? Take for instance "The Cradle Song." Sierra has the idea—the charming, unrecondite idea—of a foundling baby thrust upon the mercies of a convent of nuns, who bring her up, spend upon her all they can recover of their suppressed motherly instincts, give her to a young man in marriage, and so back to the world. Mark his means to this effect. The foundling, a varied chorus of nuns—among them one who is emotionally the play's protagonist, an old doctor (the child must acquire a legal parent) and the young bridegroom. No intrigue, no thesis, no rhetorical enlargements; two acts because his theme needs two, and no convention-satisfying third, which it does not need. The whole result is a story perfectly told for the sake of its innate humour and feeling, a picture filled and rounded. And—not that this affects the matter—it is interesting to note that with the Spanish public this play conceding little or nothing to what is usually understood to be the popular demand in such things, was yet a great success—interesting from the point of view of public and theatre-manager. The playwright at this juncture stands aside; his work is done, he bows with one emphasis or

another to success or failure, advising himself merely of the future. But the *elements* of success—this is the important conclusion if it may be drawn—are probably pretty constant, though its incidentals may vary from country to country and year to year; and it might pay theatre managers to keep a tame crowd-psychologist or so to analyse them. Then all the English-speaking public—that part of it at least which has developed some taste and judgment—would not always be left asking, as they read translated, instead of hearing in their native tongue, plays like “The Cradle Song,” why—in the name of “What the public wants”—they should be fobbed off, time after time, with entertainments which, with every well-tried appearance of being entertaining, do not *entertain*. To return however to Sierra, less occupied as a playwright with theatrical economics even than with an obtruding philosophy, though as a theatre manager—a second and successful occupation that has unluckily been thrusting aside his playwriting lately—his opinion on this point would be worth having.

“The Two Shepherds” may be coupled with “The Cradle Song.” It has the same simplicity of scheme, the same directness of approach. It is perhaps the more remarkable in that its action swings upon a stark fidelity of vision. And here is the chief of Sierra’s dramatic (distinct for the moment from “theatrical,”) virtues; he paints faithfully the thing he *sees*. Once he has his outline clear and true he may sentimentalise a little in filling in the detail; it is a venial fault. We could forgive, if need were, even more affectionate weakness on his creator’s part for snuffy, frowzy, garlic-smelling old Don Antonio with his frayed cassock and his battered image of the Virgin, pummelling (as he says) his ill-conditioned village flock into righteousness, dragging them up to God by the scruffs of their dirty necks. Again Sierra needs his two acts and no more, seventy minutes, perhaps, of playing time, but in that space he shows us a dozen characters, individual and alive, and a picture of a

Spanish village so consistent that, experience apart, we know it to be true. Mr. Sam Weller remarked that if instead of eyes he had been gifted with a pair of double hextra million magnifying glasses he might have been able to see through two brick walls and a door, but having only eyes his vision was limited. Sam, though not given to literature was a bit of a genius, apt, as his creator was, at seeing the realities of cockneydom through things even more opaque to most sights than walls and doors. It is the one gift worth having. Sierra translates for us his Spanish village in terms, no doubt, of his own happy, humorous, ironic temperament. But he has seen it first without illusion, seen it naked, seen it true and, thanks to him, so can we—and have our fun into the bargain.

Lirio entre espinas ("Lily among Thorns") and *El enamorado* ("The Lover"), one-act plays, sound dominantly the note of irony, the one in its elaborately developed situation, the other in its treatment of the character of the Lover himself. The chancing of the timid little nun into the house of ill-fame, the circumstance by which her healing touch at a sudden sick-bed brings the inmates like good little children fetching and carrying at her call, disposes of the rowdy patrons in a sulky silence—all that is ironic and amusing enough; and (a carping critic might continue) we have had that sort of thing before (Maupassant!) and many another playwright could make as much effect with it! But mark again, the clarity of vision. Sierra has seen each single figure and has informed it with a life of its own before he started the mere making use of it for his group. Even the rather fantastically unpleasant little figure of the half-witted child (it reminds one, dependent for knowledge of Spain chiefly on books and pictures, of a Velázquez dwarf) has a pitiful little individual place—and a purpose. For—and this is what every clever dramatist fired with a good idea would not give us—one is struck with the fine humanity of Sierra's treatment of his theme. No conde-

scension either! He writes about the nun and the fallen women and the gay young blackguards, their visitors, alike without vulgar astonishment, unselfconsciously, with a perfect courtesy of mind. He writes as a gentleman should.

The saliency of "The Lover," as a study of the entirely absurd gentleman who spends his life regardless of his personal affairs, in rapt and unregarded worship of the Queen is technically the sureness of the touch—it is drawn in spare outline so that one false stroke might be fatal—and above and beyond that the fearlessly comic treatment of the subject. No spice of ridicule is spared. The fellow has even a foolish sounding name; he ran a margarine factory before he ruined himself trapesing over the world after his Dulcinea (*aliter visum*); cruelest stroke of all, he has to confess that as he watches in the palace grounds through winter nights for the Queen to come out at dawn to feed her pigeons, he has, lest he perish with cold, to seek the comfortable cage, the friendly society of the orang-outang. He has a ridiculous collection of souvenirs, for which he has refused some Englishman's offer of a good round sum, (Englishman = eccentric, *c. f.* of course, the Danish gravedigger's "They are all mad there.") How odd—an Englishman writes—that *this* should be still the typical European joke about us!); he refuses the costly ring the Queen offers him—for after all, while her courtiers stood by helpless with etiquette, this preposterous being did really save her life. He asks to be allowed to kiss her hand. Is he, then, to turn heroic after all? No! for his final request is a free pass over the State railways that he may continue his foolish, useless trapesing as before.

Surely that is good art. And, with the courageous consistency, note the final effect. The fellow wins us, we take off our hats to him; the Queen is stirred to a passing emotion she never felt before. "She feels" (it is also a warning to the actress of the part not to tumble into sentiment)

"that for the first time in her life she has really been loved." Sierra is not Cervantes' countryman for nothing; and, quoting that great name, we need enlarge the general argument no further. But, glancing at the purely dramatic value of irony it is perhaps worth while to consider for a moment the peculiar difficulty of its use in the theatre. This resides, of course, mainly in the natural constitution of the actor himself. It is not, as some contemptuous critics of the art would say, an objection to being made ridiculous (though let us admit that one may now and then meet that in the self-conscious or over-popular actor), so much as a far more reasonable desire that his audience should, from the beginning, have no doubt of his intentions, should be sure that, however big a fool he is making of himself, he is doing it deliberately with his eyes open. There is nothing the actor hates more than to be at cross purposes with his audience. Hence the practical difficulty for a dramatist of the gradual disclosure of an ironic purpose, but the necessity of a ruthless consistency, by which the end shall justify both the beginning and the means. And we rule out of course any concluding claptrap of a sudden direct sentimental appeal for sympathy. "The Lover" is a simple admirable example of what an ironic play should be. For it is by the sustaining of the irony that our proper sympathy is won. The actor can round off his performance, the play's last scheme come full circle. Still something more than technique is involved. If Sierra did not love his man well enough to want to tell the truth about him and love him the better for truth being told, the silly fool could not touch the Queen's imagination and ours as he does. It is respect for poor humanity that counts. Sierra has that.

El Reino de Dios ("The Kingdom of God") is in some ways the most considerable of Sierra's work. He devises for himself a larger canvas than usual and, if for nothing else, the play would be remarkable for the number, variety, fidelity, vitality of the sketched characters with which it

is so economically filled. He demands great assistance from his actors, no doubt, but he sets them no problems of psychology, no modelling, so to speak, is asked of them, they have but to colour in "on the flat" the firm outlines of his drawing. And, for more immediate effect he places them against a background which is in itself dramatic, which in itself and in its changes, develops the action and purpose of the play. The action itself is unconventional more or less—though there is little in the shape of transgression against the unities which has not been tried in the post-Ibsen period of European drama by one dramatic experimenter or another. We mark Sierra yet once more as the accomplished man of the theatre by the ease and certainty with which he transgresses. He sacrifices everything to his purpose and contrives to sacrifice nothing. The play has, as its main thread, the story of a girl—in her girlhood, her middle and old age—who gives up her share in the things of this world to ensure, rather than seek, such a portion as she may snatch in this life of the kingdom of God. She joins a sisterhood. We find her in her girlhood ministering in an asylum for old men, foolish, tiresome and—if a stray peseta opens the door of an inn to them—drunken old men. Womanhood brings her to a home where the children of fallen women come into the world, a sadder beginning of life than was the preceding picture—so pitifully comic—of life's end. She refuses release from it in marriage (the vows of her order are not final) to a worthy doctor who worships her, with the flashing phrase "And you dare to talk to me of love . . . *here!*" Old age finds her the Mother of an orphanage, with one of God's adopted returning in laurelled triumph as a bull fighter to lay his trophy—his first bull's ear—at her feet (How one envies a Spanish dramatist that scene, but with an admiring envy for Sierra's quite perfect treatment of it!) and as a crown and ending to the play we have her passionate plea with a young revolutionary in embryo (Spain has no immediate copyright

in these at least) to abjure violence, to seek his kingdom of God in pity and in love. A very stirring play; and it is instructive to the student of drama to note the use made of the material, the means by which Sierra appeals—and most legitimately—to our emotions. He is not concerned (as an English dramatist choosing such a theme to-day would almost certainly be) with the growth or wane of the woman's religious belief, nor yet—but for that one flash already recorded—with her mental reaction to the social conditions she faces, not even with developing her "character"; in fact, it is part of his theme that she does not bother, as certain of our self-conscious philanthropists do, with any such self-righteous thing—so why should he? He relies upon making as clear in his picture to us, as in the reality it was clear to her, the human needs and their claim upon us of disreputable age, sordid sins of the flesh, and of childhood, that will bate no claim, and should not, since upon it all the claims of the world must fall. And that he does so in terms which not the simplest soul in his audience can mistake, nor the most sophisticated deny, is, it may be claimed, an achievement—complete of its kind—in the reality of art.

La mujer del héroe ("Wife to a Famous Man") makes far fewer pretensions. It is a sound playable play, little more, interesting to us mainly for the peep that it takes into working class Madrid. The dramatist, in fact, frankly tells us in a spoken epilogue that it is a passing tribute to the virtues of the Spanish woman of the people as you may walk down any street in any city to find her—as you might find her, *bien entendu*, had you Sierra's power to see and show beauty, pathos, humour in this laundry, and in the kindly, rough-tongued, honest-minded woman earning her family's living there; as good fun and as great a beauty, so felt and seen, as some of us go seeking in remoter places. He selects the rest of his material a trifle carelessly, perhaps; he has used some of it before. But it is an admirable notion, this, of a national hero made in a moment out of the winner

of an air-race (this was in the days before the war); a common fellow, reckless and stout of nerve, but with a head which, though he can keep it in the air, is only made to be turned on earth; not too much of a hero to have lived on the laundry, rapidly too spoilt to live contentedly in it.

Sierra might have added in his epilogue almost as legitimately that the play is tribute in the shape of opportunity to the actress upon whom the chief burden is to fall. But this again might be remarked of all his work (though surely it should not call for particular remark in any dramatist!) how grateful his plays are to the actor. It comes of course partly from the extreme simplicity of his method and from his never trying to force into a play more matter than it will easily hold. He seems incapable of writing anything ineffective, though now and then he may yield to the too obvious effect. That is a venial fault—in the actor's eyes at least. And Sierra, one may judge from this, does genuinely like, admire and understand the art of acting.

It is a taste that every dramatist should have. It may sound superfluous to say so, but of late years there seems to have developed in certain dramatists a distrust, even a positive dislike of acting, an unreasoning, if sometimes excusable anger with the actor himself and all his works. Now this reflects quite inevitably upon their own work and its result is to be seen in a stiff unyieldingness, a drabness and dryness, a self-sufficiency, as if to say "You actors are my megaphone merely. Please don't presume." Upon such a perverse misunderstanding of what the free and full collaboration between actor and dramatist should be, the drama can never flourish. The trouble springs partly, one fears, from the quite uncalled-for acclaim of the modern dramatist as "a literary man." He bows, a bit snobbishly, to the intended compliment and then from literature's present pontifical height is apt to begin to look down on the motley theatre. In a short time, if he's not careful, he'll soon be writing plays fitter for the study than the stage. There is no good play

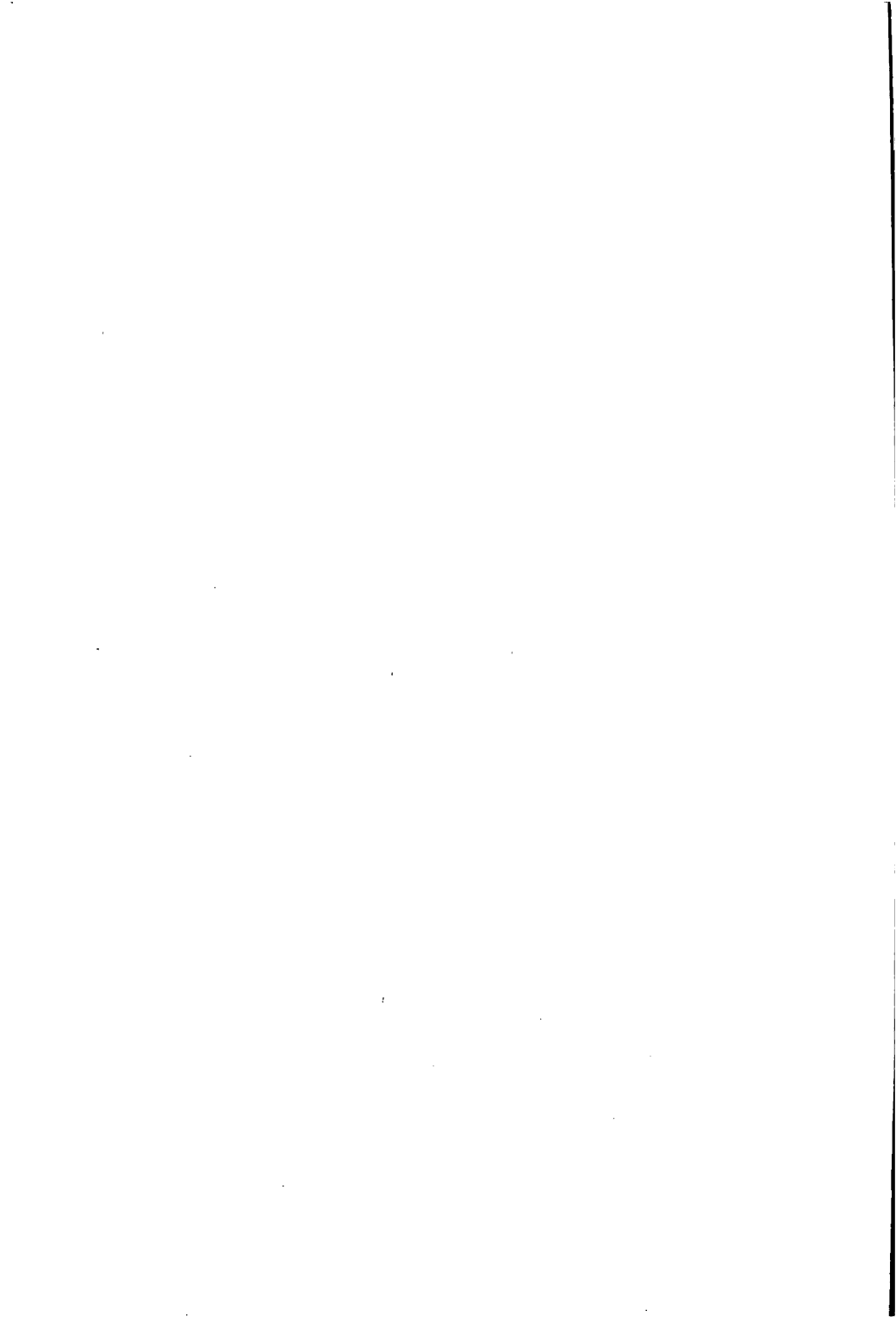
of which that can be said. There are good plays enough that need better acting than our present theatre with its stupid system and its artistically uneducated public, by whose favour it must live, can be expected to supply. But no progress is possible in the art as a whole unless all concerned—dramatists, actors, yes, and public too—such a selection from the mob as can form a conscious third—move forward together. In England we are still far from that happy state of things. The theatre is commercially prosperous, artistically at cross purposes. Dramatists may complain of their actors, but actors are bitterer about managements, and managements alternately curse at and despise the public—save, of course, during the runs of luck that most of them, gambling long and good-temperedly enough, may look for. Spain no doubt has her theatrical troubles too; we are not here concerned with them. But it is at least a sign of artistic good health to find such plays as Sierra's among its living drama, apt above all things for acting, and for such acting as, one is sure, is bread and meat to the appetite of the audience, wholesome and familiar fare that they know the good and the bad of.

If one comments no further it is not for lack of material. The author's works, his plays alone (there are novels and poems besides. He is forty. What is the secret of this amazing fecundity of the Spaniard?) would take a page or more only to list.

Plays like *Madame Pepita*, *Mamá*, *Sueño de una noche de agosta*, (played in English as "The Romantic Young Lady," and the little fantasy *Hechizo de amor* ("Love Magic")) are of a content to which we are more accustomed in the French and English spoken drama of to-day. There are yet others, less usual in form and content too, but these will find their way to translation some day and may then more appropriately be dealt with. This must suffice now, an inadequate introduction, perhaps, to a playwright whose adequacy is, in any case, beyond question.

H. GRANVILLE BARKER

THE LOVER
COMEDY IN ONE ACT
TEATRO DE LA COMEDIA, MADRID
1913

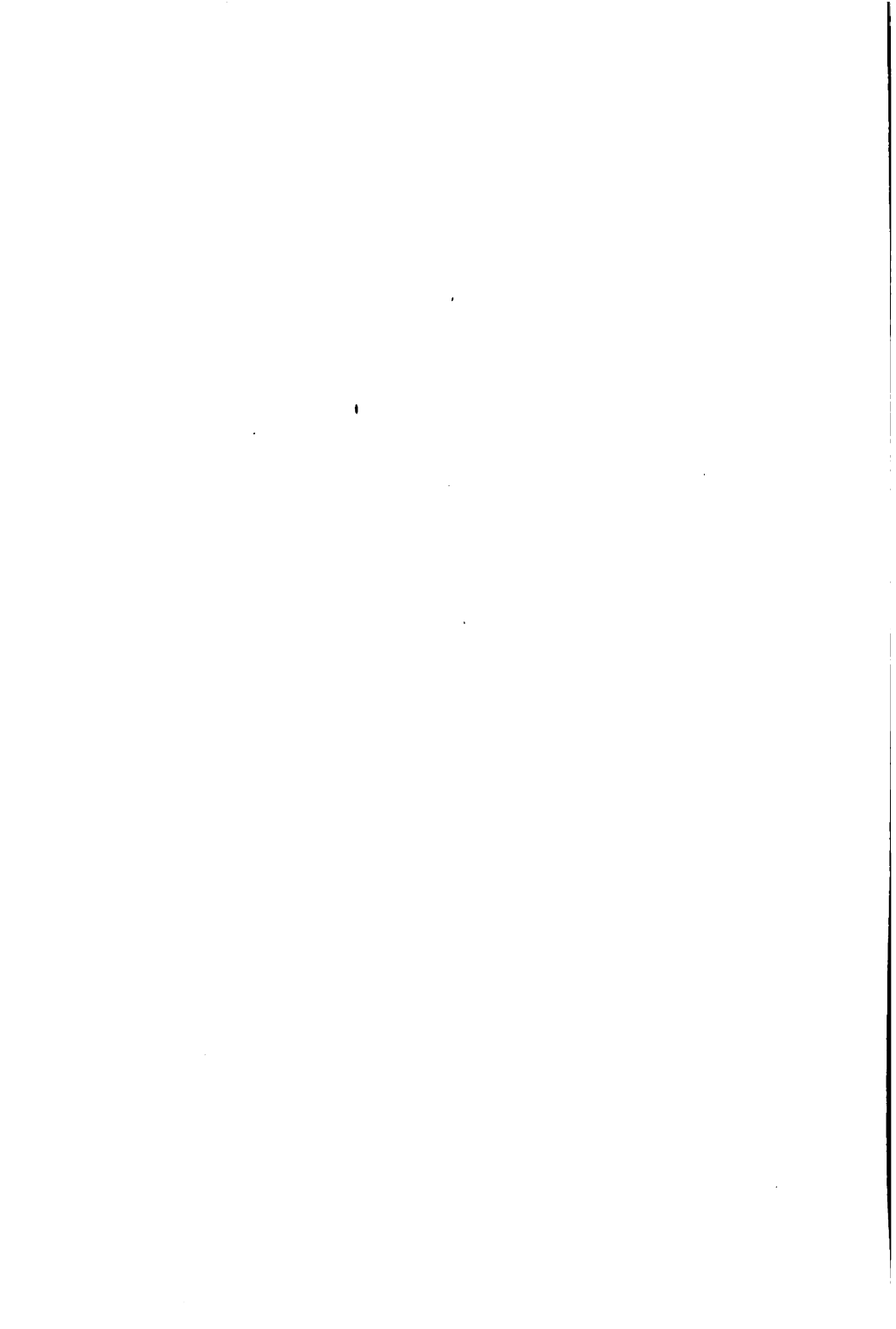


CHARACTERS

THE QUEEN.

THE LOVER.

THE LADY IN WAITING.



THE LOVER

Salon in a Royal Palace. Although of extreme richness, the furnishings preserve an atmosphere of simplicity.

The stage is empty when the curtain rises. Loud shouts and cries are heard outside, as if an accident were taking place. Then various noises follow, clamor and confusion. After a moment THE QUEEN enters, followed by THE LADY IN WAITING.

THE QUEEN is a beautiful woman, gowned in faultless taste. She is about forty years of age. Her hair is very dark, except for a solitary white lock which appears almost directly above the middle of her forehead; but this she does not attempt to conceal by any artifice. She enters in full regalia, as if attired for some court ceremony. From her shoulders hangs the royal mantle.

THE LADY IN WAITING is about sixty years of age, rather nobly plain. She also is in full court dress.

THE QUEEN. [*As she leaves THE LADY IN WAITING, who attempts to support her.*] No, let me be, I am not hurt. . . . It is nothing.

LADY IN WAITING. Has Your Majesty suffered no injury?

THE QUEEN. None, I assure you.

LADY IN WAITING. But the shock, the fright—be seated, Your Majesty. [*She assists her to remove the Court Mantle.*] Your Majesty must rest. At least drink a glass of water.

THE QUEEN. [*Seating herself in an arm-chair.*] You may bring the water, but I will have nothing in it. Let it be pure as God made it.

[*THE LADY IN WAITING brings the water from a table which stands near by.*]

LADY IN WAITING. But, Your Majesty, it is cold; Your Majesty is overheated—

THE QUEEN. Give me the glass. [*She takes it from the LADY IN WAITING.*] You are trembling all over.

LADY IN WAITING. Ah, Your Majesty, you have no idea how frightened I was, how frightened we all were, when the horses reared in the traces! Your Majesty can imagine . . . the overturn, the coach shattered into pieces, Your Majesty thrown upon the ground!

THE QUEEN. [*Smiling.*] Fortunately there was somebody waiting to receive me. How fortunate that that man [*Laughing.*—my knight-errant—was so near!

LADY IN WAITING. [*Displeased.*] Certainly, Your Majesty.

THE QUEEN. [*Looking at her for a moment, then laughing.*] We shall have to award him the Grand Cross. Are you frowning?

LADY IN WAITING. Your Majesty!

THE QUEEN. But what is the matter? What is on your mind?

LADY IN WAITING. Your Majesty, that man was unmannerly and impertinent. Your Majesty will not be displeased, but his deportment was horribly incorrect. To catch Your Majesty in his arms without permission!

THE QUEEN. Yes, if he had allowed me to break my neck, his conduct would have been more correct. In that case he would not have committed a breach of etiquette. No, indeed! It is not every day that a woman, even if she is a queen, is in peril of her life, and has the experience of being saved from death in a gallant's arms.

LADY IN WAITING. Your Majesty amuses herself.

THE QUEEN. Perhaps I do, but not unkindly. Poor fellow! However, you may malign him as much as you like.

LADY IN WAITING. Your Majesty, I do not malign him when I suggest that it is incorrect and impertinent for this person to follow Your Majesty wherever you go.

THE QUEEN. [*Laughing.*] Like my shadow!

LADY IN WAITING. Like a rude, ill-bred fellow who is ignorant of decency and of the requirements of etiquette. Your Majesty never leaves the Palace but that he is standing on the pavement opposite. You cannot go to church, or to the theatre, or visit the parks, or attend any public ceremony but that he is there in the front row, yes, or nearer than the front row, as he was to-day.

THE QUEEN. Fortunately for me.

LADY IN WAITING. Your Majesty, loyal vassals were not wanting to fly to Your Majesty's assistance.

THE QUEEN. [*Gently.*] Yes, so I saw when the horses reared. Half a dozen dukes began to run, but what with etiquette which kept them at a safe distance and rheumatism which would not permit them to run, my royal person was in grave danger. [*Laughing.*] Indeed, if it had not been for him—

LADY IN WAITING. Skulking in a bramble bush, like a lover in comic opera!

THE QUEEN. Love is no respecter of hiding places. It is foolish to laugh at hidden lovers, even in comic opera. Besides, what you say was a bramble bush appeared to me to be a laurel, and men take as naturally to laurels nowadays as they did in the time of Petrarch. Some of the leaves have even clung to my robe. [*Picking off two or three.*] Almost enough to weave a crown for my lover.

LADY IN WAITING. Your Majesty surely does not imply that that man is in love?

THE QUEEN. Why not? Don't you think so?

LADY IN WAITING. He is utterly deficient, lacking. How do we know? Perhaps he may be . . .

THE QUEEN. An anarchist? But how stupid! In the twenty years he has followed me, he never yet has found an opportunity . . .

LADY IN WAITING. [*Horried.*] Your Majesty!

THE QUEEN. [*Laughing.*] Of showing disrespect.

LADY IN WAITING. Does Your Majesty consider that this extraordinary persecution shows no disrespect?

THE QUEEN. But what has become of him? Where is he?

LADY IN WAITING. He has been detained.

THE QUEEN. Where? For what reason?

LADY IN WAITING. For having introduced himself without permission into the Palace Gardens.

THE QUEEN. To save the life of his Queen! The end justifies the means.

LADY IN WAITING. Your Majesty, he could scarcely have been advised beforehand that Your Majesty's coach was to be overturned, and at that particular spot in the Palace Gardens.

THE QUEEN. Then you do not believe in presentiments?

LADY IN WAITING. Your Majesty, I am too old for such things.

THE QUEEN. [*With a note of melancholy in her voice.*] So am I—for such things.

LADY IN WAITING. Your Majesty!

THE QUEEN. No, we both know how old I am, and so does the world. Decreeing her age is not one of the prerogatives of a queen. [*Taking up a hand-glass, she gazes into it attentively.*] Horrible, is it not?

LADY IN WAITING. Your Majesty is marvellously young.

THE QUEEN. Even so, marvels do not last long. Whenever I look into the mirror I am aghast at the wrinkles which I shall find there very soon. I know, too, where they will come. [*Indicating her eyes and mouth.*] They show already when I laugh. Ah, when she is twenty, how carelessly a woman laughs! [*Putting down the mirror.*] When I laugh, I cover my face with my fan. When I am forty, I shall have all the Palace mirrors broken. [*She recites simply.*]

“When forty winters shall besiege thy brow”

You recall Shakespeare's sonnet?—

"When forty winters shall besiege thy brow
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
Thy youth's proud livery, so gazed-on now,
Will be a tatter'd weed, of small worth held;
Then being ask'd where all thy beauty lies,
Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,
To say, within thy own deep-sunken eyes,
Were an ill-eating shame and thriftless praise.
How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use,
If thou couldst answer 'This fair child of mine
Shall sum my count and make my old excuse,'
Proving his beauty by succession thine!
This were to be new made when thou art old,
And feel thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold."

[*Sighing.*] I have never had a child!

LADY IN WAITING. Your Majesty! [*Affectionately but disapprovingly.*] Your Majesty has no right to consider such a thing.

THE QUEEN. No, of course not. Ah! [*Smiling again.*] Do you suppose he could be a poet?

LADY IN WAITING. Why a poet?

THE QUEEN. Why not? In any case we shall soon know.

LADY IN WAITING. We shall? How?

THE QUEEN. I shall ask, and learn his answer.

LADY IN WAITING. Surely Your Majesty does not intend—

THE QUEEN. To receive him? Precisely.

LADY IN WAITING. But Your Majesty, he is nobody.

THE QUEEN. In that case we shall become acquainted more easily. I shall offer him my thanks.

LADY IN WAITING. Your Majesty's Government will thank him officially.

THE QUEEN. But he has saved me personally, and I shall thank him personally. I will receive him now.

LADY IN WAITING. Your Majesty!

THE QUEEN. If there is nothing else that you wish to suggest . . .

LADY IN WAITING. Unless Your Majesty has changed her mind?

THE QUEEN. No, do not be alarmed. There is nothing to fear.— Ah! And I will receive him alone.

LADY IN WAITING. As Your Majesty commands.
[*She goes out.*]

[THE QUEEN again takes the mirror and gazes into it fixedly. With a woman's instinct, she rearranges her hair; then laughs at herself and lays the mirror down again.]

THE QUEEN.

"When forty winters shall besiege thy brow" . . .

[THE LADY IN WAITING and THE LOVER appear in the doorway. He is forty years of age, neither well nor badly dressed. He wears a black sack suit, his beard is pointed, his hair somewhat long and slightly touched with gray. He comes forward greatly agitated. THE LADY IN WAITING retires.]

THE LOVER. Your Majesty!

THE QUEEN. No, come in.

THE LOVER. [*Advancing a step, then making a reverence.*] Your Majesty!

THE QUEEN. Come nearer.

THE LOVER. Your Majesty!

THE QUEEN. I have sent for you to offer my thanks.

THE LOVER. I do not deserve them. Your Majesty will command.

THE QUEEN. It was a happy chance that brought you into the garden.

THE LOVER. Yes, Your Majesty, yes.

THE QUEEN. And I am deeply grateful to you.

THE LOVER. No, Your Majesty, no.

THE QUEEN. But I am. Indeed I am!

THE LOVER. Your Majesty will decide.

THE QUEEN. But how is it that you were able to gain admission to the Gardens?

THE LOVER. Very simply.

THE QUEEN. In spite of my guards?

THE LOVER. Your Majesty, it was not the fault of your guards. I climbed the wall at the rear by the plane trees, out of sight of the guards.

THE QUEEN. In broad daylight?

THE LOVER. No, Your Majesty, last night. Your Majesty must not be alarmed—

THE QUEEN. But the wall is very high there. You might have injured yourself.

THE LOVER. No, Your Majesty, I am used to it.

THE QUEEN. Used to it?

THE LOVER. Yes, Your Majesty, on Saturdays. The factory shuts down over Sunday, so I am not obliged to work. I have plenty of time; I can sleep where I like.

THE QUEEN. Do you spend the night in the open air, in the garden?

THE LOVER. It is very pleasant in the summer time.

THE QUEEN. Do you mean that in winter?—

THE LOVER. Just the same; yes, Your Majesty. [*She makes a gesture of astonishment.*] Only when it freezes, I go into the house with the orang-outang. Your Majesty keeps him now on the further side of the parterre. Don't be alarmed, Your Majesty; we are great friends. He is very fond of tarts and roast chestnuts, so you see there is no danger.

THE QUEEN. Great Heaven! Is it possible? Are you in your right mind?

THE LOVER. Yes, Your Majesty.

THE QUEEN. But, my good man, what is the object of exposing yourself in mid-winter in this fashion, in such singular company?

THE LOVER. Your Majesty . . . really . . . I don't know whether or not I ought to tell you.

THE QUEEN. But you must!

THE LOVER. Your Majesty, every night before you retire, and when you get up in the morning, Your Majesty comes out upon the terrace before your apartments. In the evening, you look up at the stars; in the morning, you feed the white doves.

THE QUEEN. Yes, I do, poor things! I like to toss them a few handfuls of corn.

THE LOVER. [*Interrupting.*] Indian corn.

THE QUEEN. How do you know?

THE LOVER. The wind usually carries some grains off the terrace.

THE QUEEN. Do you pick them up?

THE LOVER. Yes, Your Majesty, when I can, which is not often. The paths are swept every morning, so when night comes, they are no longer there.

THE QUEEN. What? Do you keep them?

THE LOVER. Yes, Your Majesty. I have a collection of souvenirs:—the grains of corn; a feather from Your Majesty's hat, which blew out one day while you were driving; a piece of fur from one of Your Majesty's boas, which you wore at the last Carnival—it caught in the railing as Your Majesty left the stand; a coin Your Majesty threw from your coach to a little beggar boy in the street; a tortoise-shell hairpin which fell into the garden one morning along with the corn; a pair of gloves; two of Your Majesty's slippers—I purchased them from a maid of one of the Ladies of the Wardrobe—and I don't know what else! You see, it is a little museum. An Englishman offered me a thousand pounds sterling for it.

THE QUEEN. [*Interested.*] What did you do?

THE LOVER. Your Majesty, the heart is not for sale.

THE QUEEN. You must be rich.

THE LOVER. No, Your Majesty, I was—that is to say, rich enough; I made a good living. But now, I am poor.

THE QUEEN. Have you lost your money?

THE LOVER. Yes, Your Majesty. But we will not speak of that; it is of no interest to Your Majesty.

THE QUEEN. But it is. It interests me very much. May I ask . . . ?

THE LOVER. How I lost my money? Yes, Your Majesty, it is not a secret. Even if it were, since it is Your Majesty . . . I spent it upon railway tickets, sea-voyages, rooms in hotels. Your Majesty is such a great traveller!

THE QUEEN. Were you following me? [*He nods his head in assent.*] But this is incredible.

THE LOVER. No, Your Majesty, no. Travelling is very expensive. As long as Your Majesty remained in Europe, it was not so bad; but when you made a voyage to India and another to the Fair at Chicago, and immediately after, a pilgrimage to the Holy Land—

THE QUEEN. Did you follow me even as far as India?

THE LOVER. Yes, Your Majesty. Your Majesty will remember that the voyage was undertaken on account of your health. Your Majesty may not know it, but the doctors agreed that it was a question of life and death. It was necessary for you to have a change of climate. Thanks be to God, Your Majesty recovered, but you might have died on the journey. Your Majesty will understand that under the circumstances it was impossible for me to remain in Europe.

THE QUEEN. Impossible!

THE LOVER. [*Ingenuously.*] Absolutely.

THE QUEEN. But I cannot consent to have you spend your fortune like this.

THE LOVER. Your Majesty, do not give it another thought. It was not exactly a gold mine. A few thousands, that was all—the factory which I had the honor to mention to Your Majesty: “The Unrivalled, Makers of Butter and Cheese”—purveyors to Your Majesty, yes, indeed! It was mine, now it belongs to another. That is all.

THE QUEEN. But you . . . ?

THE LOVER. I am assistant bookkeeper now; I check up the accounts.

THE QUEEN. That must pay you very little.

THE LOVER. Pshaw! Nothing to speak of. It is a humble position. Believe me, Your Majesty, I am capable of much more than that. If not proprietor, I might still have been manager, or foreman at least, only—

THE QUEEN. Only?

THE LOVER. Only . . . Your Majesty will not be displeased, but I must keep my time free. The fact is . . . well, I have taken this position because it gives me a living and—[*Looking down at his clothes*—and enough to appear respectable, because it requires only two hours a day, from half past nine until half past eleven in the morning, precisely the hours at which Your Majesty confers with your Ministers. Your Majesty will understand . . .

THE QUEEN. [*Laughing.*] Certainly! At that same hour we are both at the office.

THE LOVER. No, no, Your Majesty! Your Majesty misinterprets my meaning. I never presumed to think . . . the fact is . . . well, between those hours my mind is more free; I am able to work without distraction, to apply myself. I am sure that Your Majesty is not upon the streets.

THE QUEEN. How long do you expect to continue this life?

THE LOVER. As long as I am able, Your Majesty, and Your Majesty does not prevent. Your Majesty is not offended at what I have said?

THE QUEEN. Offended? No! But . . . you must be very unhappy.

THE LOVER. No, Your Majesty, very happy. *Very* happy! That is, not as happy as I was, because now, when Your Majesty leaves Court, I am not always able to travel. Rascally coin! But, fortunately, now Your Majesty travels less. It will not do to ask too much of fortune. Your Majesty, after what happened this morning, I . . . I am

repaid for everything which I have suffered in the world. Your Majesty cannot imagine how happy it makes me that . . . that is, Your Majesty cannot imagine how glad I am that this incident . . . although I would have given my life to have prevented it . . . I mean . . . Your Majesty understands what I mean.

THE QUEEN. Yes, yes, I do. Do not distress yourself. I, too, am glad that it was you—

THE LOVER. Your Majesty!

THE QUEEN. Because . . . I have noticed your face for so many years, I have seen you for so long a time.

THE LOVER. Your Majesty has noticed me?

THE QUEEN. Naturally.

THE LOVER. Probably Your Majesty thought that I was a photographer for one of the illustrated papers?

THE QUEEN. I thought that you were a poet.

THE LOVER. No, Your Majesty! No! Never!

THE QUEEN. Have you never written verses?

THE LOVER. [*Disappointed.*] Does Your Majesty like verses?

THE QUEEN. Yes, I am very fond of them.

THE LOVER. Goodness gracious! No, Your Majesty, no! Never! Never! [*Brightening.*] But I know by heart almost all the verses which have been published about Your Majesty—birthday verses, verses celebrating your victories, your works of charity, and so on, and so on. There are so many of them! Your Majesty of course knows them, too?

THE QUEEN. Not those verses. [*Smiling.*]

THE LOVER. God bless us!

THE QUEEN. But you must not be troubled. One may be a poet, and yet not write verses.

THE LOVER. Does Your Majesty think so?

THE QUEEN. Certainly, we may write poetry or we may live it. [*Deeply affected.*] And devotion and self-denial, illusion and dreaming, the sacrifice of one's life to an ideal,

an impossibility—these things are also true poetry, great poetry, are they not?

THE LOVER. [*Not understanding.*] No doubt, Your Majesty, no doubt. Of course, since Your Majesty says so.

THE QUEEN. And you are a great poet of life.

THE LOVER. Your Majesty says so.

THE QUEEN. And I—because you are—in memory of this day, of this event, which also is an extraordinary one in my life—I am going to give you a present to add to that collection which you tell me of, and I hardly know—because of your delicacy, your sacrifices, really—will you accept this remembrance from me? [*She offers him a jewel which she wears upon her breast.*]

THE LOVER. No, no, Your Majesty! No! By no means! Really. Not that jewel! No, no!

THE QUEEN. But why not?

THE LOVER. Because a jewel is—a jewel. That is, it has value—in itself; and—no, Your Majesty! No, no!

THE QUEEN. I did not wish to give offense.

THE LOVER. No, Your Majesty, no! It is not that. It is . . . the way I feel. A caprice! If your Majesty would deign to give me some reminder, something personal, perhaps, of no value.

THE QUEEN. As you wish.

THE LOVER. If you would let me have that mirror, Your Majesty, after looking into it, once. [*THE QUEEN looks into the mirror and then hands it to the Lover.*] There . . . Your Majesty! Thanks! Your Majesty will permit me to kiss your hand? [*He kisses it.*] Thanks, thanks, Your Majesty! Believe me, Your Majesty—[*Deeply moved.*] This is the happiest day of my life.

THE QUEEN. I, too, am greatly obliged to you, and I wish to ask you a favor. If at any time you desire anything, anything which it is within my power to grant, you will do me a great kindness by coming to me.

THE LOVER. [*Hesitating, wishing to ask something.*]
Your Majesty!

THE QUEEN. Now . . . Tell me truly, is there nothing that you wish?

THE LOVER. Your Majesty! Since Your Majesty has been so kind . . . If Your Majesty would exert your influence with the Minister of the Interior to have him grant me a pass over the railways of the Kingdom.

THE QUEEN. You shall have it this very day. Is there nothing else? What is your name?

THE LOVER. Matthew, Your Majesty. Matthew Brown, Your Majesty's humble servant.

THE QUEEN. [*Repeating the words so as to fix them in her memory.*] Matthew Brown. You shall have it this afternoon. Now, you may retire. [*She strikes a small silver bell.*] And many thanks yet again. [*To the LADY IN WAITING, who enters.*] Let this gentleman be escorted to his home, and a note be made of his address. [*She bows, dismissing him.*]

THE LOVER. Your Majesty! . . . [*Bowing very low, he is about to disappear, but as he reaches the door, he turns and says:*] It need not be first class. [*Goes out.*]

THE QUEEN. [*Disturbed, pacing up and down the room, without knowing whether to laugh or to cry:*] Matthew Brown! Matthew Brown! [*To THE LADY IN WAITING, who re-enters.*] Has he gone?

LADY IN WAITING. Yes, Your Majesty. But Your Majesty is unwell! Has this man given offense? He has been impertinent—

THE QUEEN. No! No! On the contrary. Poor fellow!

LADY IN WAITING. Was he a poet?

THE QUEEN. A poet? No. That is—yes, in his way. Imagine—but how can you imagine? My God! This poor man has given his life for me, for to him his cheese factory was his life. Four centuries ago he would have

fought under my banners, he would have conquered a kingdom for my sake, he would have discovered a new world and have laid it at my feet, and now—now, to see me feed corn to the doves, he sleeps in a cage with the orang-outang! And his name is Matthew Brown—Matthew Brown, the Lover! The poet was right:—We have been born too late into a world which has grown too old!

CURTAIN

LOVE MAGIC

COMEDY IN ONE ACT AND TWO SCENES

SALÓN NACIONAL, MADRID

1908

CHARACTERS

THE PROLOGUE.

PIERROT.

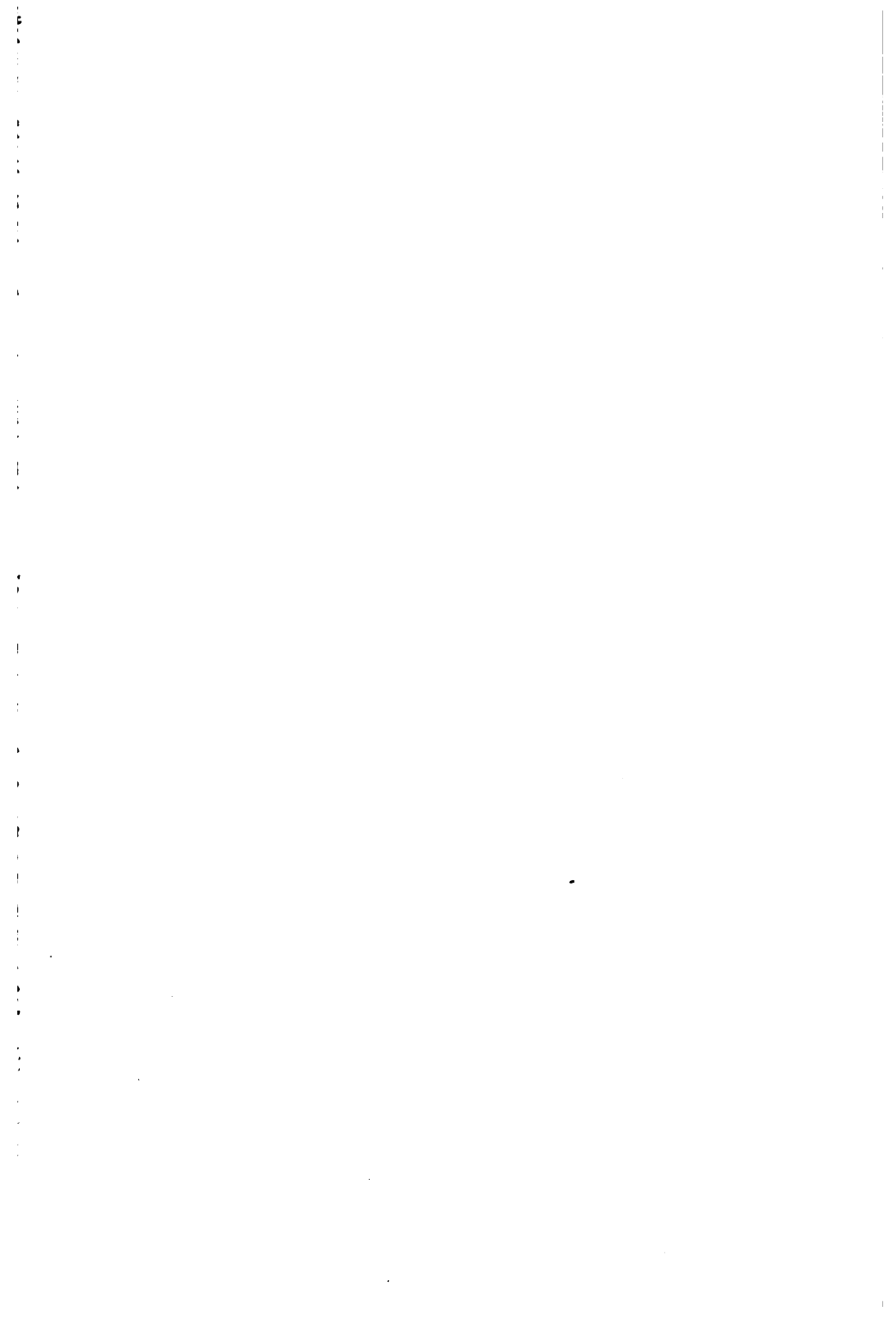
COLUMBINE, *Pierrot's Wife.*

PIERRETTE, *Maid and Confidant of Columbine.*

POLICHINELLE, *An Old Magician.*

HARLEQUIN.

A LITTLE GIRL.



LOVE MAGIC

THE PROLOGUE. Rum-a-tum-tum! Ladies and gentlemen! Although I am a marionette, I am the Prologue. And invested with so high a dignity, permit me to announce the subject of the comedy which is about to be presented, and to address you in eulogy of the personages who are to appear in it. Ladies and gentlemen! Inevitably it treats of love. Love! Love! I wish, ladies and gentlemen, I were a poet at this moment so that I might present to you in a nosegay of the sweetest smelling syllables a panegyric of that dear misfortune, that delightful pain, that fatal passion, that enchantment, that irresistible effluence of the stars, that fierce consuming of the soul, that death-dealing microbe—or whatever it is that you may decide this delicious inquietude to be, which, through all the centuries, men and women have agreed to call love. You would listen amazed, if I were such a poet, to the crackling and scintillation of my metaphors; you would admire and marvel at the unstable, shifting winds, the soft, unfolding flowers, the broad expanse of heaven, the silver fountains, the caverns, the eagles, the sun rays and the moonbeams, and all the twinkling stars which I should make dance before you upon the rope of my imagination to embellish my discourse. You would twiddle your thumbs with delight, ladies and gentlemen, listening to my discourse, if I were a poet; but I have already told you that I am not one; I am only a marionette and the Prologue. I see you smile. Smile, then, but don't disdain me. To be these two things at one and the same time one must amount to something. Marionette! I see you laugh. Joy sparkles in all your eyes. Do you suppose that it is a small thing to have a name the very mention of which is enough to

make people laugh? And do you suppose it is nothing, when you have it, to be able to live up to it throughout the ages and to uphold such a reputation with a dignity which, after all, is purely ridiculous? And we have upheld it, yes we have, ladies and gentlemen, splendidly, like kings and princes. Our little bodies are our witnesses. To win applause they disjoin themselves, twist and turn and bend backward, throw off their arms and heads into the air, or lose a leg in a high prance to get it back again in a pirouette. See! We palpitate from head to foot, every inch of us, as if our bodies were all hearts. And yet, ladies and gentlemen, beyond a doubt we have no hearts. What should we need of them when we vibrate and fly from one thing to another so continuously without them?

A LITTLE GIRL. But, Mr. Prologue, how can marionettes love if they have no hearts?

THE PROLOGUE. I did not say that they could love, my dear young lady.

LITTLE GIRL. Didn't you say, Mr. Prologue, that your comedy was about love?

PROLOGUE. That is exactly it. It is about love, but it is a comedy.

LITTLE GIRL. Oh!

PROLOGUE. But do not be sad, beautiful black eyes, for our comedy will be incomparably played. All the love in the world could never discover lover's sighs anywhere which would be like those of Columbine.

LITTLE GIRL. Good! Good! Are you going to tell us about Columbine?

PROLOGUE. Why not? Know then that she is white, but not pale, because in each of her cheeks every instant a rose is about to be born. She has painted her lips with the red of poppies, and one day when she sat down to dream, looking out over a meadow, two violets sprang up and jumped into her eyes. Since then nobody has been able to tell whether her glances were fragrance or light,

and out of this sweet confusion, as out of all beautiful confusions, a harmony springs, which we call music. And so the look of Columbine is a song. Merely listening to her sing and hearing her laugh, men have gone mad. So her mind is like a wonderful bird-cage, filled with nightingales, which, like all captive nightingales, feed upon hearts—upon her heart. That is why Columbine is unfaithful to Pierrot, sometimes—to feed her heart. For Pierrot, who is a marionette and a puppet as she is, refuses her the heart's meat on which, as I have told you, the nightingales feed.

LITTLE GIRL. Good! Good! Now tell us about Pierrot.

PROLOGUE. What shall I tell you about Pierrot? His mind is like a sunbeam which has fallen into a globe of crystal and clear water, and all the colors are there in it, except one, which is constancy. You see today he imagines he is a philosopher, but out of his philosophy roses spring, so that our comedy which begins with a sigh, ends with an embrace, or, rather, with two embraces, because Harlequin, after he has sung his song so earnestly, and to such utter disdain, consoles himself for love by loving, and for the kisses which he cannot get, by those the girls will give. For this is the proper way all love songs should end. Try and sing them, gentlemen, you will always find some ear that is willing to hear. And you, beautiful ladies, listen to the song of love while it is floating in the air and catch it on the wing, for you will find that it is tame and it thrives in captivity. Ask Pierrette if the kisses have not turned to honey which she has taken in when they had lost their way and had nowhere else to go. Now, ladies and gentlemen, I can only add that wisdom is about to appear upon the stage of our farce, but the triumph of folly will oblige him soon to break his wand. [*The curtain rises.*] The comedy begins. This is the garden—I forgot to tell you that the stage represents a garden. Open your ears, for the foun-

tain begins to play, open your eyes for the roses are bursting into bloom.

[*The PROLOGUE retires.*]

SCENE I

In PIERROT's garden. There is an arbor with rustic benches at the right. It is spring. Trees and bushes droop their boughs, laden heavily with flowers, perfuming all the air. The breezes sing with the voices of birds, and the sky smiles bright with sunshine.

COLUMBINE, seated within the arbor, whose foliage conceals her almost completely, seems wrapped in melancholy thought. PIERROT walks up and down at the rear, musing, and gazing contemplatively from the sky to the ground and from the ground to the sky, lingering lovingly before the flowering trees and talking to the flowers.

PIERROT. [*Declaiming.*] O Nature! Mother without beginning and without ending, beyond the touch of time! What can I do to merit all thy gifts? Roses of fire! How can I ever hope to know the mystery which is flaming at your hearts? Lilies! How can I penetrate the secrets of your petals of white snow? Thanks, thanks, O Beauty, thanks, for thou hast rent thy veil before mine eyes! And in contemplation of thy treasures I must end my life.

COLUMBINE. Ah! Woe is me!

PIERROT. [*Disappearing, lost in the depths of the garden.*] Thanks, thanks, a thousand thanks! I value my vision and my poet's dreams above all the splendors and above all the loves of earth and heaven.

COLUMBINE. Ah! Woe is me!

[PIERRETTE enters, accompanied by POLICHINELLE.]

PIERRETTE. Enter, Signor Polichinelle, quickly; for now Signor Pierrot is wrapped in his meditations. He will not discover that you are here. Enter . . .

POLICHINELLE. Did you say that your mistress had sent for me?

PIERRETTE. Oh, how eagerly, Signor Mage! Could I but make you understand how wretched the poor child has been! Does it not pierce the very soul to look at her? She spends all the day and the night-time sighing, she is fading away so fast. That divine form of hers is not what it once was, alas!

POLICHINELLE. Alas!

PIERRETTE. How oblivious men are to such things, Signor Mage!

POLICHINELLE. Not all men.

PIERRETTE. My lady is like the driven snows of heaven to her spouse. [*Turning toward the back with a menacing gesture.*] Ah, Signor Pierrot! Signor Pierrot!

POLICHINELLE. Hush! I think Columbine has discovered us.

COLUMBINE. [*Coming out of the arbor and advancing in tears toward POLICHINELLE.*] Ah, Signor Magician! How impatiently I have awaited your arrival!

POLICHINELLE. [*Bowing.*] Signora Columbine!

COLUMBINE. Bring chairs, Pierrette.—Ah! Woe is me!

POLICHINELLE. Do not sigh, lady.

COLUMBINE. I am so unhappy!

POLICHINELLE. I congratulate you—

COLUMBINE. Upon being unhappy?

POLICHINELLE. No; upon finding that your beauty has not faded so fast as I had been led to suppose. Of course, I had heard from Pierrette—

PIERRETTE. [*Returning with the chairs.*] What do you know about such things, you old dotard? Nonsense! I

suppose a woman's beauty is like an article of religion in your eyes—there is no more to it than seeing and believing.

COLUMBINE. Leave us, Pierrette!

PIERRETTE. [*Before retiring, she looks toward the rear, where it is to be supposed that she sees PIERROT.*] There he is now. Look at him!—bending over the roses, and, I dare say, composing verses in their praise. I would hand him a bunch of roses if he had the honor to be my spouse! Ah, Signor Pierrot! Unhappiest of men! Don't you know that you are not the only poet in the world; that there are others who compose as beautiful verses as you do, and to better purpose? . . . [*The notes of a cithern are heard in the distance.*] Didn't I tell you? It is the good Harlequin.

HARLEQUIN. [*Singing.*]

White roses are her forehead,
The waving grain her hair,
The stars her eyes;
Alabaster pure her shoulder,
And the beauties that enfold her
The starry skies.

Who would not be of the roses,
Or the grain that is her hair?
Her starry eyes?
Or her neck of alabaster,
Serf and slave where she is master—
Her deep heart's sighs?

[*The words are heard afar off, linked with a haunting melody. PIERRETTE listens, entranced, emphasizing them with gestures of approval. COLUMBINE rises indignantly, the first stanza scarcely concluded, and presently addresses PIERRETTE.*]

COLUMBINE. Pierrette!

PIERRETTE. Lady!

COLUMBINE. Didn't I command you to send that impertinent fellow away? His music is displeasing to my ear.

PIERRETTE. In compliance with your command, I shut the gate in his face, and the body of your lover remains outside in the alley, sore distressed. But his spirit—woe is me!—is an immaterial thing, and who can deprive Signor Harlequin of the consolation of sending it after you wherever you may be, on the wings of his songs?

COLUMBINE. Go and tell him that he offends me with his music.

PIERRETTE. I would not be too severe with him, if I were you. What harm can it do just to hear?

COLUMBINE. [*Indignantly.*] Pierrette!

PIERRETTE. [*As she turns to go.*] All, all are blindly in love with the impossible: my lady with her husband, Harlequin with my lady, and with me, nobody—which, alas, is only too possible!

[COLUMBINE *sinks again into her chair and sighs wearily.*]

POLICHINELLE. [*Greatly perplexed.*] But will you be kind enough to explain to me what the matter is? What is the meaning of these tears, these songs of Harlequin's, this inexplicable discontent upon the part of your maid? Why all this mystery? I am distracted—I shall go out of my head.

COLUMBINE. Ah, Signor Polichinelle, love is the most mysterious thing in the world!

POLICHINELLE. I should be sorry to have you think so. Love is a natural function; it is simple, perfectly simple. The difficulty is that we complicate it with spiritual distinctions. Ah! That is where the trouble begins. Nature is never willing to have man improve upon her processes.

COLUMBINE. The fact is—

POLICHINELLE. That is precisely the fact.

COLUMBINE. The fact is that my husband does not love me.

POLICHINELLE. What do you say? What is that? Pierrot is deceiving you?

COLUMBINE. He is not even deceiving me. Oh, if only once he would deceive me! Then, at least, I might be thankful that he had had the grace to consider me, to make some effort to preserve my ideals.

POLICHINELLE. But your rival?

COLUMBINE. My rival, Signor Mage, is Nature. [POLICHINELLE is dumbfounded.] Yes, Pierrot is a poet—the more miserable he! He adores the carmine in the roses, but he disdains it upon my lips. He worships the azure of the overarching sky, but he cannot see it in the teardrop which glistens in my eye. He drinks sweet perfumes on the breezes, but he will not quaff them from the zephyrs which are wafted from my mouth. . . . Ah! Woe is me! Woe is me!

POLICHINELLE. Pierrot a poet? You are right. Poetry in marriage is entirely out of place. It is an intruder, an interloper, like anything else which we do not expect. But these songs of Harlequin's?

COLUMBINE. They are another complication, Signor Mage. My misfortune, thanks to the little pains which my husband takes to deceive me, has become known to all men, and Harlequin has had the audacity to presume to console me for it. He wishes me to follow the old adage which says that "Love is cured by love," he . . .

POLICHINELLE. What is it that he wishes you to do?

COLUMBINE. Have no fear, I shall not follow his advice.

POLICHINELLE. You are right. For this notion that love can be cured by love is sheer nonsense. Believe me, there is no cure for anything on earth, outside of science. You can trust me for that, Signora. I am a wise old man.

COLUMBINE. That is the reason I have sent for you.

POLICHINELLE. You have done well, my daughter. [*He meditates.*] You say that your husband has deserted you, he has abandoned and is tired of you, he writes verses—all of these are bad signs, very bad. However, fortunately—

COLUMBINE. Is there no remedy?

POLICHINELLE. One—one which is well-nigh infallible. [*He draws a crystal phial from the recesses of his robe.*] Take this phial. In it has been brewed a philter, compounded by magic art out of the essence of your tears.

COLUMBINE. But what shall I do with this philter?

POLICHINELLE. Whenever Pierrot is pensive and absorbed, wrapt in his poetic ecstasy, let fall but one drop from this phial, and poesy—adieu!

COLUMBINE. I do not understand.

POLICHINELLE. Listen. For example, you say that Pierrot is enraptured with the azure of the skies. Spill but one drop, let fall but one tear, and the sky will be covered with thick clouds in his sight.

COLUMBINE. I understand.

POLICHINELLE. So, little by little, hour by hour, he will become disenchanted with all natural beauty, and he will turn again to yours.

COLUMBINE. Which also is natural, believe me, Signor Mage.

POLICHINELLE. I believe you—ah, too well! Adieu!

COLUMBINE. How can I ever thank you?

POLICHINELLE. Do not thank me too much, or your gratitude will overcome my wisdom, and lay it prostrate in the dust. Signora! . . .

[*He bows and retires.*]

COLUMBINE. I am saved. [*Calling.*] Pierrette! Pierrette! [*PIERRETTE enters.*] Come and rejoice with me.

PIERRETTE. [*Disappointed.*] Do you mean—that is to say—Has the Sage found a remedy? Then—

[Endeavoring to conceal a note which she is carrying in her hand.]

COLUMBINE. What is that? What paper are you trying to conceal? *[She seizes it.]* A letter from Harlequin! Is this the way that you obey my commands?

PIERRETTE. I gave your message to Signor Harlequin, and he was cast down into the uttermost depths when he heard that his song had given you pain; and so, to prove that he intended no offense, he has written out the verses on this piece of paper, which he begged me to put into your hands; but if you do not wish it—

COLUMBINE. No, no, let me see. Surely I ought to read what they are. It is my duty to make an example of him—a horrible example! *[She runs her eye over the paper.]* Words and phrases of fire, fire shall put out your fire!

PIERRETTE. My lord!—my lady.

COLUMBINE. Spirit of God, aid me now!

[PIERROT enters. He carries a bunch of purple roses in his hand. As he advances, he gazes lovingly from flower to flower, and begins meditatively to recite the verses which he has composed in their praise.]

PIERROT.

Purple petals, rich in hue,
God has shed his blood for you—

[COLUMBINE lets the first drop fall from the phial.]

PIERROT. *[Crying out.]* Ay!

COLUMBINE. *[Running up to him.]* What is the matter?

PIERROT. A thorn pierced my hand.

COLUMBINE. My love, leave the roses, for they are full of thorns. *[She takes the flowers from PIERROT's hands and dashes them violently upon the ground. They leave a purple trail behind them as they pass through the air, and then fall, their stems bare. PIERROT watches them fall and*

sighs heavily. COLUMBINE *flings herself into his arms.*] What are you thinking of? What is on your mind? Don't you know that my love is a flower that can never be stripped bare?

SCENE II

PIERROT's garden in autumn. There are no more flowers in it—only a few pallid roses and some hardy chrysanthemums. At the back glows the red of the setting sun. Above, little white clouds are driven fitfully across the sky, while at intervals gusts of wind shake the trees and scatter the dry leaves upon the ground, or rustle them about in restless golden whorls.

COLUMBINE and POLICHINELLE are seated in the garden. COLUMBINE is even more melancholy than in the first scene.

POLICHINELLE. But it is clearly impossible! Do you say that my remedy produced no effect?

COLUMBINE. A most marvelous effect.

POLICHINELLE. Frankly, then, I do not understand.

COLUMBINE. The remedy was worse than the disease. Pierrot has ceased to be a poet, but he has become a philosopher.

POLICHINELLE. A philosopher?

COLUMBINE. Yes, so much the more miserable he! Your philter was too efficacious. For days now there has been no sky without clouds for Pierrot, no rose without a thorn, no pleasure without loathing and disgust. Even the perfume of the flowers gives him pain, so that I, too, have almost begun to pity him.

POLICHINELLE. But have you manifested your pity with tenderness and affection?

COLUMBINE. As affectionately as I was able; but alas! when my husband, disillusioned with the perfidies and imperfections of Nature, turned to hate and despise them, he took it into his head that my beauty, also, was a natural

thing, and it has been impossible to disabuse him of it. You can imagine the consequence. My lips seem to him like roses, my eyes like the sea or the sky, my hair like the sunbeams; and not only that, but Pierrot has discovered in various parts of my person all the blots, scars, stains, blemishes, tempests and storm-clouds that afflict the universe or offend the sense of beauty. I am worse off than I was before, Signor Mage. [*A pause ensues.*] Have you no new remedy to prescribe for this new evil?

POLICHINELLE. It will be difficult, Signora Columbine. It seems that the spirit of your husband is obdurate to love. If you could only learn to forget, to resign yourself—

COLUMBINE. Is that all your boasted science can do? Know then that I do not wish to resign myself; I wish to love. I am looking for a cure, not for consolation.

POLICHINELLE. Do not be angry with me, lady. The problem is stubborn and involved. But I shall study it in my laboratory, and I swear to you that I will never emerge from it so long as I shall live, unless I have found an infallible medicine. [*He goes out.*]

COLUMBINE. Science and wisdom hear!

[*PIERRETTE enters.*]

PIERRETTE. Wisdom? I should like to know what wisdom has got to do with love? What does that old impostor know about it anyway? At his age!

COLUMBINE. Age is a guarantee of knowledge.

PIERRETTE. Not to me. It may be in some things, but in affairs of the heart practice makes more perfect than learning. In love, experience is the key which opens hearts; if it is not used, it rusts. And I do not need to ask you how long it must be since Signor Polichinelle has used his key.

COLUMBINE. Will you always destroy my illusions, Pierrette?

PIERRETTE. Yes, because one reality is worth a thousand illusions. Signor Harlequin—

COLUMBINE. Do not talk to me about Harlequin!

PIERRETTE. Signor Harlequin is a reality. Believe me, my lady, there is no illusion about him. I know, and I can answer for it. Besides, you must be convinced by this time that all the drugs of the sorcerers are of no avail to win back the heart of Signor Pierrot.

COLUMBINE. Alas! So I am. Woe is me!

PIERRETTE. So that you will never find a remedy through the aid of science?

COLUMBINE. I fear it.

PIERRETTE. Leave it to me, then, and let me put my plan into execution.

COLUMBINE. What plan? What is it that you wish to do?

PIERRETTE. You will soon see. Without any other science than experience, which I have picked up on my way through the world, I shall save you. The first thing to do is to receive Harlequin.

COLUMBINE. Pierrette!

PIERRETTE. Though it be only to undeceive him. One angry word from your lips would have a thousand times more effect than a thousand sermons from mine, which, to tell the truth, were not made for sermons.—But in any case, he is here.

[HARLEQUIN enters and throws himself at COLUMBINE'S feet.]

HARLEQUIN. Queen of my soul, sun of my spirit, magnet and pole of my desire!

COLUMBINE. What is this? Rise!—Pierrette, is this the way that you obey my commands?

PIERRETTE. Pardon, lady, but it is too much for you to expect me to stand forever between the fire and the wall. You don't know to what dangers I have been exposed, contending continually against the ardors of Signor Harlequin!

HARLEQUIN. My lady, in turn I beseech you to pardon

PIERRETTE. It was not her negligence, but my audacity, which caused this wrong, if wrong it be.

COLUMBINE. How?

HARLEQUIN. Does the heart overwhelmed in darkness sin because it desires the light?

COLUMBINE. Desire is one thing, performance is another.

HARLEQUIN. Columbine, in the minds of lovers desire is performance. The desires of Love are mandates, peremptory as the laws of life!

COLUMBINE. You blaspheme, Signor Harlequin. Certainly, to love like this is a crime.

HARLEQUIN. What matter so long as it is love? Do not shrink and draw away from me! Move closer, lady. At least listen to my tale of woe. Grant me this solace—

COLUMBINE. Will you promise to go away then immediately, if I do?

HARLEQUIN. If you ask me to.

COLUMBINE. And will you promise never to come back?

HARLEQUIN. If you are not convinced by my arguments.

COLUMBINE. You may talk.

HARLEQUIN. Thanks.

[*He kisses her hand.*]

COLUMBINE. I said talk.

HARLEQUIN. My lady, that was the irrepressible cry of my soul.

COLUMBINE. You have a soul that has been most rudely brought up.

PIERRETTE. [*To COLUMBINE.*] Good! Lead him on.

HARLEQUIN. Pardon, lady, for my soul and for me. We have both hungered through so many ages for a sight of this glory, that now when we find ourselves in your presence, my soul and I, face to face, it is small wonder that

we forget our ill-fortune, and become boys again, and throw to the winds all sense of proper restraint.

COLUMBINE. Which my dignity cannot excuse, Signor Harlequin.

HARLEQUIN. But your love and your sympathy ought to excuse it.

COLUMBINE. Do you presume to talk to me of ought?

HARLEQUIN. Ought there not to be many oughts between you and me, Columbine, oughts and never an ought not?

COLUMBINE. Between you and me?—You?

HARLEQUIN. Yes, Columbine, me; me—and you. For I am wretched for your sake!

COLUMBINE. It is not for my sake.

HARLEQUIN. It may not be through your fault.

COLUMBINE. I like that better.

HARLEQUIN. But it is the same to me; my misery is the same, because I love you, Columbine, I love you, I love you so much that when I love you all I can, I hate myself—unhappy that I am!—because I cannot love you more. I love you, I love you, I love you!

[Each time that he says "I love you," he kisses her hands passionately.]

COLUMBINE. *[Defending herself a little, but not displeased at heart.]* Not so loud, Signor Harlequin! Not so loud—there may be an echo in the garden.

[They wander off at the rear, pursuing the debate, and disappear.]

PIERRETTE. I should never have believed it possible that the grief of my mistress would have been so difficult to console.—Ah, me!

[PIERROT enters. He carries a book in his hand. He reads and meditates.]

PIERROT. To think that even in the dewdrops—the radiant tears of morning—there is a world of monsters, a contending universe of pain! To know that the smiling verdure of the fields is but the mask of foul decay, the

immortal beauty which we love, the veil and dull similitude of death!

[He paces back and forth, absorbed in his meditations.]

PIERRETTE. *[Approaching him, sympathetically.]* Signor Pierrot—

PIERROT. Who speaks to me? Ah! Is it you? *[Angrily.]* Why are you smiling? Why are you so happy?

PIERRETTE. Signor, life is beautiful.

PIERROT. Do you know what you bear within? A skeleton, a void, nothing! *[A pause follows.]* Where is your lady?

PIERRETTE. She was here a moment since, so wretched over your philosophy. She was in tears. But now she is consoling herself—that is to say, she has company. Signor Harlequin—

PIERROT. Harlequin?

PIERRETTE. A most extraordinary young man, proud, handsome, amorous—

PIERROT. What is that?

PIERRETTE. And an excellent poet. My lady could not possibly have chosen better company.

PIERROT. What do you say? Why do you tell me these things?

PIERRETTE. Because they are true.

PIERROT. What makes you look at me like this?

PIERRETTE. I was counting sadly the wrinkles which philosophy has dug in your brow.

PIERROT. Tell Columbine that I wish to see her.

PIERRETTE. Do you think it will be wise to interrupt them now?

PIERROT. Is she so intent upon that visit?

PIERRETTE. Look and see. There they are . . . *[PIERROT retires and peers through the shrubbery.]* Do you see anything?

PIERROT. That Harlequin is a fool.

PIERRETTE. Oh, no, he is not! Why, all the while one is with him, he has such winning ways. [COLUMBINE laughs.] My lady laughs. Poor lady! It is so long since I have heard her laugh. Ah! Look!—I wondered what they were doing. That was a happy stroke of Signor Harlequin's. But what is the matter? [PIERROT starts to run and rushes headlong off the stage like one possessed.] Where are you going? Ah, ha, ha, ha! See him run! Ha, ha, ha! A jealous man is always ridiculous! There he is now. He is furious . . . My lady pleads for mercy. And Signor Harlequin—he effaces himself—he fades modestly out of sight . . . I am sorry for that man!

[The sound of rude voices is heard in the garden; shortly afterward HARLEQUIN emerges from the trees. He comes forward with a dejected, disappointed air, and hurries rapidly across the stage.]

PIERRETTE. [Detaining him.] What is the matter, Signor Harlequin? Was not my lady willing to be consoled?

HARLEQUIN. Your lady is a model of conjugal fidelity.

PIERRETTE. Who told you to go wandering in other people's gardens, exploring hearts which have masters? Better stick to the highways and the byways, Signor Rover, and to fields which are virgin.

HARLEQUIN. Do you know any?

PIERRETTE. That is a reflection upon me. What do you mean, Signor Harlequin?

HARLEQUIN. I mean any disposed to receive me?

PIERRETTE. Why, Signor Harlequin! I—What do you want me to say? I am a young and inexperienced girl, but I am sure that there must be someone—perhaps not so very far away. You know what the song says: "When least you expect it"—And I never expected it. Don't look at me like that . . .

[A pause ensues. PIERRETTE'S eyes become eloquent in the silence of her lips, and pronounce a significant discourse.]

HARLEQUIN. [*With sudden resolution.*] Could you love me, Pierrette?

PIERRETTE. Ha, ha, ha! Do you think I win my victories through other people's arms?

HARLEQUIN. Don't be cruel!

PIERRETTE. My lady is much more beautiful than I.

HARLEQUIN. Illusion! The beauty of woman is all one great store, one vast and perfect body, of which every woman is but an individual part. Your lady is beautiful, you are as beautiful as she—both different parts of the same great beauty.

PIERRETTE. But, I wonder, just what part of this great beauty that you tell me of, am I?

HARLEQUIN. From what I feel, you must be very near the heart! [*They embrace.*]

[PIERROT and COLUMBINE re-enter and advance into the garden. They also are locked in an embrace, and gaze steadfastly into each other's eyes, full of happiness.]

COLUMBINE. Swear to me that you are telling me the truth, Pierrot.

PIERROT. I swear it. The fear of losing you has revealed to me the truth that your love was the soul of my life. Your words are the most beautiful of poems, and your embraces the most enduring of philosophies.

POLICHINELLE. [*Entering precipitately with a phial in his hand.*] Signora, here is the philter, the love magic, the true, the infallible medicine!

[*All laugh gaily, and PIERRETTE carries her impertinence so far as to mimic the magician with many a comic grimace. POLICHINELLE stares at them in amazement. The phial which he carries in his hands explodes with a loud report, and the Elixir of Love is scattered upon the ground.*]

PIERRETTE. It was about time to explode it.

POLICHINELLE. What is this I see?

PIERRETTE. What you see, Signor Mage, is simply this:

that science is superfluous when it comes to affairs of the heart. There all wisdom is vain, and all philters are colored water. For love is cured by love, and disdain by jealousy; so it has been since the beginning of the world, and so it will be until the world has ceased to be. Spells and conjurations are of very little use. The love that has fallen asleep through excess of good fortune is not be awakened again without the menace of another love which is more passionate, and which burns like youth's fire. That is all there is to it. My master was asleep because my lady loved him too much, and he has waked at the fear that she might cease to love him so. Don't you see?

POLICHINELLE. Hum—what I see. But—[*Pointing at HARLEQUIN.*] Wasn't this gentleman also in love?

PIERRETTE. Head over heels; you can surely see it.

POLICHINELLE. [*Protesting.*] But not with you.

PIERRETTE. Ha, ha, ha! He thought not himself, but he soon found his mistake, through my assistance—and the force of circumstances.

POLICHINELLE. Hum!

HARLEQUIN. Although I am a young man, Signor Polichinelle, and a poet, I too have my philosophy. And in the first chapter, there is this maxim: "He who refuses to console himself for the kisses which he cannot get, by those the girls will give, is mad entirely."

[*The sorcerer, scandalized, takes to his heels, covering his ears with his hands, then throwing his arms into the air, brandishing them wildly. Soft, sweet music sounds, and the two pairs of lovers begin a slow and stately dance.*]

CURTAIN

POOR JOHN

COMEDY IN ONE ACT

TEATRO LARA, MADRID

1912

CHARACTERS

MARIANA, *aged 20*

JOHN, *aged 22*

ANTONIO, *aged 23*

MAMÁ INÉS, *aged 66*

MAMÁ PEPA, *aged 70*

DON CARLOS, *aged 48*

TWO FACTORY HANDS

TWO MAIDS

POOR JOHN

A formal garden en parterre. A number of wicker arm chairs, rocking chairs and a chaise longue, all of which are plentifully provided with cretonne cushions, are set out in the shade of a sturdy walnut tree. Two tables stand near by, one containing a tray with fruit and breakfast service, the other, boxes of candy, flowers, and a bundle of lace tied with ribbon. There are flowers also on the chaise longue.

MAMÁ PEPA and MAMÁ INÉS are seated together. MAMÁ INÉS is sewing. MAMÁ PEPA has been reading, and removes her spectacles, wipes them with her handkerchief, and puts them on again.

MAMÁ PEPA. It is going to rain this afternoon.

MAMÁ INÉS. Nothing of the sort! What makes you think it is going to rain?

MAMÁ PEPA. Don't you see that cloud coming up?

MAMÁ INÉS. Yes, it is wind.

MAMÁ PEPA. I say it is rain. My leg tells me so.

MAMÁ INÉS. Well, my arm tells me that we shall have fine weather for the rest of the week.

MAMÁ PEPA. God help us both! [*The factory whistle blows.*] There goes the whistle. The factory clock must be fast today.

MAMÁ INÉS. Nothing of the sort. How can it be fast when it was eight o'clock ten minutes ago?

MAMÁ PEPA. Did your arm tell you that?

MAMÁ INÉS. No, the sun told me. It is around on the second stone in the gallery floor already.

MARIANA. [*Speaking outside.*] Good-bye, good-bye! Thank you, thank you all so much . . . [*Laughing.*] Of course! Thanks awfully just the same. Good-bye, good-

bye! [*She enters carrying a bouquet of roses in one hand.*] I believe they all love me. Everybody seemed so happy as they went away. Perhaps they really do love me, too; everything in this world cannot be put on. [*She goes over to the table.*] Roses, lilies, carnations . . . Gracious! And chocolates! [*Taking one.*] I must save a few, though, for John. Poor boy, he has such a sweet tooth—just like me! Our tastes are the same in everything. [*The old ladies cough. MARIANA looks up, but pays no attention.*] Isn't it too lovely to be twenty and have so many presents? [*The whistle blows again.*] The second whistle! It sounds more like a ship's siren than it does like a factory whistle. I should like to go on a long, long voyage.

MAMÁ PEPA. Yes, and get sea-sick.

MARIANA. What of it? I should go ashore on some islands which are nowhere on the map, and discover them, and civilize the natives—that is, not altogether, because then they would have to wear trousers and gloves and top-hats. Men are never so ugly as when they are all dressed up.

MAMÁ INÉS. You don't know what you are talking about.

MARIANA. Mamá Pepa and Mamá Inés, you two dear old grandmothers, I am so happy! But, oh, how I do long to be so much happier!

MAMÁ PEPA. It would make no difference to you.

MARIANA. Yes, it would; that is, it seems to me it would make a great deal of difference. I am happy now because the sun shines and I am twenty, and there is nothing the matter with me, I thank God for that. Everything seems to be so simple and easy, so much a matter of course. But happiness must be something a great deal more—it must be more inside of you, don't you know? It must be something awfully solemn. No, not exactly solemn either. I mean . . . Anyway, sometimes a girl feels so happy that she would just love to cry.

MAMÁ PEPA. Mercy on us! What is wrong with the child?

MARIANA. You will find out when the time comes—if the time ever does come.

MAMÁ INÉS. She is out of her head.

MARIANA. My two dear, old respectable grandmothers, do you really think that the time ever will come? Do you really? Or are you just perfectly certain that it will not?

MAMÁ PEPA. Think what time will come?

MARIANA. The time that every girl is longing for, without having any idea what it is?

MAMÁ INÉS. My dear, you will find out soon enough for yourself that everything in life is either unpleasant, or else it comes too late.

MARIANA. God bless us!

MAMÁ PEPA. Pay no attention to what she says; it all depends upon the point of view. When the night is darkest, God sends the morning. Don't allow yourself to brood and mope. However bad things may be, they might be worse, or else we should not be here to see them. A chicken may be light-hearted and yet have a stone in its gizzard.

MARIANA. Do you know what the factory girls say? That I ought to pray for a sweetheart every day, because it's high time for me to have one.

MAMÁ INÉS. What would you do with a sweetheart at your age?

MAMÁ PEPA. She could get married, like everybody else.

MARIANA. Of course! And then I could have lots of children. I mean to have ten at least, all boys, hard workers, strong, clever, fearless, brave, so that they can travel all over the world doing great and splendid things, and build roads and factories and houses and schools, and make laws and conduct revolutions. They will be strong as castles, every one of them. I believe that ten real men would prove the salvation of any country. [*Discovering*

her father, DON CARLOS, who enters.] Father, how many ministers have we in the Spanish cabinet?

DON CARLOS. Such as they are, I believe there are eight.

MARIANA. Then I shall have two over. One can be a poet and the other a philosopher. And a grateful country will erect a statue to my memory!

DON CARLOS. What is all this nonsense?

MARIANA. Congratulate me. This is my birthday. I am of age—I am twenty. [*Submitting to an embrace.*] Aha! Are you sorry? You seem sad. [*Sympathetically.*] I know . . . it is mother.

MAMÁ PEPA. Carlos, she looks more like my poor daughter every day.

DON CARLOS. Yes, she does.

MAMÁ INÉS. Nothing of the sort! She is the living image of her father.

DON CARLOS. Omitting all his faults, let us hope.

MAMÁ INÉS. There are no faults to omit. I don't say so because he is my son, but I wish you could have seen him when he was twenty-five.

MAMÁ PEPA. I wish you could have seen my daughter when she was eighteen.

MARIANA. Well, all you have to do is to look at me. How dreadfully embarrassing it is to be such a beautiful girl!

MAMÁ PEPA. Thank Heaven, she is good-natured.

MAMÁ INÉS. Yes, it is a family trait.

MAMÁ PEPA. Naturally.

MARIANA. [*To her father.*] Do look at all my presents! The flowers are from the factory hands, the candies from the girls at the sewing-school, and the Sunday School children sent me this piece of lace. The cross is from Mamá Pepa, and the rosary from Mamá Inés, with real coral beads, so you see I have two really good grandmothers, as far as one can judge from their presents. What are you going to give me?

DON CARLOS. Whatever you like. [*Taking out his pocket-book.*]

MARIANA. No, don't give me any money; I have more than I know what to do with. We started the sewing-school to help the poor girls along, but now we are all making our fortunes. I had nothing myself, yet we can scarcely keep up with the orders. The preserves that Mamá Inés and I put up are a success, too, though we only began because it was such a pity to throw the fruit away. We have had inquiries, even, from a shop in Madrid.

DON CARLOS. Name anything you wish.

MARIANA. I would if I dared. There is one thing—yes, I am going to ask for it. Now don't you say no! Promise not to be angry. It . . . it . . . it isn't for myself, but it is just the same, you know; it's for John.

DON CARLOS. For John?

[*Both old ladies cough. MARIANA turns and glares at them.*]

MARIANA. Yes, it's for John . . . that is, not exactly for him either, it's for his father. Don't you see? I told you that I didn't want money, but now that I come to think of it, it is money. At least it is something very like it.

DON CARLOS. Well, is it or is it not?

MARIANA. Don't be cross. No, it isn't money. Only I want you to go surety for them so that they won't lose their house.

DON CARLOS. Do you expect me to guarantee all the old Marquis's bad debts?

MARIANA. Why, papa!

DON CARLOS. Do you realize what it means to stand sponsor for a man of that character?

MARIANA. All they have left is the house, and now they are going to lose that for a miserable trifle which they borrowed of that skinflint. John's mother is sick, too, and John is worried about her. Poor John! I know that to be responsible for them—that is, for John's father—I sup-

pose though he can't help it; it's the way he is made. I tell you what to do. You buy the mortgage, and then they can owe the money to you. You will never put them out, so everybody will be satisfied.

DON CARLOS. You have strange ideas of business.

MARIANA. It isn't business, it's a birthday present. I am twenty—think of it, twenty! What wouldn't you give to be twenty again? And you are, don't you see, because I am, and whatever I am, is yours. Besides, I promise never to do it again. [*Embracing him.*] Oh, haven't I a rich and stingy father! Do say yes! Look me in the eye and say yes! Say yes!

DON CARLOS. Very well, to please you. [*Smiling.*] But I don't want to hear any more about it. When John comes, send him to me, and we will talk it over; I shall have nothing to do with his father. Only I want you to understand that it is casting pearls before swine; they will be worse off by the end of the month. However, to please you—

MARIANA. Thanks, thanks, oh thanks!

DON CARLOS. Do not thank me, for I am doing it against my will. Enough for the present!

MARIANA. Where are you going?

DON CARLOS. Back to the factory.

MARIANA. How you do love to see people work! Remember, be home on the stroke of twelve, because Mamá Inés has promised us all sorts of good things, and if the rice is spoiled, we shall be lost. It will be a lovely surprise, too, for poor John!

[DON CARLOS goes out.]

MAMÁ PEPA. [*Scornfully.*] Poor John!

MAMÁ INÉS. Some day we are going to get sick of poor John.

MARIANA. Do you think so?

MAMÁ INÉS. Before long we shall have him in the soup.

MARIANA. Nonsense!

MAMÁ PEPA. Mamá Inés is right, my dear. I do not approve myself of a young lady of twenty keeping company with a young gentleman of twenty-two. He follows you wherever you go.

MAMÁ INÉS. I see nothing to object to in that. She and John were brought up together, almost like brother and sister. There is no harm in their going about. What I do not like is having the child take an interest in him which is improper.

MAMÁ PEPA. I see nothing improper in that. It is the duty of those who have plenty to be generous with those who have not. What I am afraid of is that she may encourage him to expect something else.

MAMÁ INÉS. Nothing of the sort. He is as modest as a mallow and as good as God's bread.

MAMÁ PEPA. He may be as good for all I know, but he is a man, and men—

MAMÁ INÉS. Do you think you can tell me anything about men, Mamá Pepa?

MAMÁ PEPA. Probably not. You know it all already.

MAMÁ INÉS. What am I to understand by that remark?

MARIANA. Come, come, don't be angry, you two dear grandmothers! What if John is good? Well, so much the better for him. What if I do love him? He loves me as much, at the very least. We have always been together, so nobody is surprised; it has become a habit. I help him whenever I can because I am rich and he is poor. Besides, everybody has somebody to look out for; you have me, and I have John. So I say God help us all! Here he comes as calm and placid as can be.

MAMÁ INÉS. If he is coming, I am going. There is plenty to be done in the kitchen, and it behooves us all to roll up our sleeves.

MAMÁ PEPA. In that case, I had better run and feed the canaries.

[MAMÁ INÉS and MAMÁ PEPA go out.]

MARIANA. [*Laughing.*] Enter the ogre. Poor John!

[JOHN appears. *He is a young man of winning personality, distinguished in manner and faultless in dress, but evidently depressed and greatly cast down.*]

JOHN. May I . . . ?

MARIANA. Come in.

JOHN. [*Advancing.*] What were you laughing at?

MARIANA. My grandmothers are jealous of you.

JOHN. Your grandmothers hate the sight of me.

MARIANA. Mamá Inés says that you are as good as God's bread.

JOHN. A polite way of intimating that a man is a fool.

MARIANA. Why do you look at me?

JOHN. You are entirely too lovely for this hour in the morning.

MARIANA. I am not as lovely as I was, for I am aging very rapidly. Don't you notice it?

JOHN. You?

MARIANA. Do you notice anything unusual in my face? Don't I seem serious? I am a year older at least than I was yesterday.

JOHN. A year older than you were yesterday?

MARIANA. Exactly. I was nineteen yesterday and I am twenty today.

JOHN. Well, I *am* a fool!

MARIANA. [*Laughing.*] I accept your congratulations.

JOHN. I am a blockhead, an idiot not to remember!

MARIANA. [*Laughs.*]

JOHN. Don't laugh. Why didn't you tell me yesterday?

MARIANA. So as to be able to remind you that you had forgotten today—as usual, of course.

JOHN. Mariana, you are not fair with me.

MARIANA. Of course not! But look at all the bonbons I have saved for you. Help yourself. Besides, I have good news. How is your mother?

JOHN. What do you expect? Her cough is worse, she is exhausted. Then, by some accident, she heard about the

house, although we intended to keep it from her. So now she has something else to worry over. She says that if we are compelled to give it up, it will kill her; she will die. That is all there is about it.

MARIANA. How does your father feel?

JOHN. Father says he will shoot himself.

MARIANA. He never will.

JOHN. I know, but mother believes him. Whatever he says, she takes literally. Mariana, we have lost our home. This is not living. I don't know what I should do if it were not for you. If it were not—

MARIANA. If it were not?

JOHN. If it were not for you, I might be the one who shot my-self.

MARIANA. You certainly are a brave man!

JOHN. How can you expect a man to be brave when he meets with nothing in life but misfortune? Everything has gone wrong with me since the day I was born. Whatever I put my hand to fails utterly. You know it better than I do. I was brought up to be rich, and I am poor. I studied law, and I can not string three words together. A man must be strong in that profession, he must have vigor of body and mind, yet I am all out of breath if I walk up a hill; I have not the heart to crush even a fly. To save the little that remains to us after the folly of my father, I need to be unscrupulous and bold, yet my mother, God bless her, has taught me to be good, good, always good, like God's bread, as you have just heard from your grandmother.

MARIANA. [*Laughs.*]

JOHN. Yes, laugh. I have a letter which I wish you would translate into English. You can help me. It will only be time wasted, but never mind. It is to some lord who is visiting the province in search of antiques—fabulous creatures, are they not? He might stop in at our house and offer us a handful of duros for the silver which still remains in the chapel.

MARIANA. Do you mean to tell me that you would sell the chapel silver?

JOHN. Yes, and the genealogical tree that hangs in the drawing-room. I have an idea that it might be worth a few pesetas.

MARIANA. Why, it would be like selling your name!

JOHN. My name? We would sell our souls, if Satan had not abandoned the practise of buying them.

MARIANA. Hush, you heretic!

JOHN. But I weary you with my troubles.

MARIANA. No, I was only thinking what a strange thing life is. Why is it that some people always have good luck, while others are always down? Everything always turns out well with me.

JOHN. [*Earnestly.*] Because you deserve it.

MARIANA. Nobody deserves anything, because nobody chooses his disposition, or the place in life he is going to fill.

JOHN. Now you are the one who is talking heresy.

MARIANA. Then I am sorry, for it is the truth. What have I ever done to deserve anything? I have simply lived and have been happy, and that is the way I go on. I thank God again and again for all my happiness whenever I remember how good He has been to me, but most of the time I forget even that. I do not believe that I have had one sorrow since the day I was born—I mean one real sorrow, that was my own. When my mother died, I was too young. Of course, I am sorry for other people who are unhappy, but all the while I am happy myself. I have never been ill. I never had any trouble with my lessons, like most children. Nobody ever found fault with me, and whatever I do prospers. Yet all the while, I hear people complain. The times are hard, they say. So I suppose my good luck, which seems to me the most natural thing in the world, is nothing short of miraculous, and I begin to ask myself when I think it over: "Why is it, good God, why is it?"

JOHN. Accept it and do not think it over.

MARIANA. Sometimes I am terribly provoked with you.

JOHN. Why?

MARIANA. Because you are so meek. Whatever happens, you resign yourself and submit to it; you ask no questions. I believe that you walk through the world with your eyes shut, and that is why you bump your head against stone walls all the time.

JOHN. Please don't be angry with me. I cannot bear it.

[*He covers his face with his hands.*]

MARIANA. Does your head ache?

JOHN. A little.

MARIANA. [*Drawing near.*] You look pale. Have some coffee?

JOHN. No, I have drunk too much already.

MARIANA. Last night? I knew it. You sat up reading. How late was it before you went to bed?

JOHN. It was morning. Don't be angry with me. You were awake yourself.

MARIANA. I? Goodness gracious!

JOHN. There was a light burning in your room all night.

MARIANA. [*Laughing.*] Because I fell asleep so quickly that I didn't have time to put it out. What did you think? I rode to Robledo yesterday to see my cousins, and we played tennis, I don't know how long, and then we went rowing, so I was tired out when I came home. I am ashamed to tell you, but I never went to bed at all. I knelt down by the bed to say my prayers, and when I came to, it was morning. I fell asleep with the first *Pater Noster*.

JOHN. You must feel ill today.

MARIANA. Don't you believe it! My eyes were a little heavy at first, but a cold shower, and no one could ever have suspected it.

JOHN. You are a cold shower, my dear girl, from head to heels, and a draught of health, outside and inside sunshine and morning. I envy you, and how I love you!

MARIANA. How you say it! Come, we had better write that letter. You might dictate it in Spanish, although it will be a waste of time, now that I think of it. I told you that I had good news for you, and you haven't even asked me what it was. However, I remembered my own birthday, so I asked father for a present. You could never guess what he gave me—the mortgage!

JOHN. [*Not comprehending.*] The mortgage?

MARIANA. Yes, yours—your mortgage. Don't you remember? The mortgage which is held by that man who threatened to foreclose and sell your house. My father is going to pay it off, whatever it is, and then you can owe it to him, just as you did to the other man, only father won't foreclose, so you can stay on and live in the house forever. [*Greatly affected.*] And you won't have to sell the silver or the family tree either!

JOHN. Mariana!

MARIANA. Hurry and see father and you can fix everything.

JOHN. [*Choking.*] Mariana!

MARIANA. Won't your mother be happy?

JOHN. Mariana! [*Seizing both her hands.*] You are the best woman in the world. Nobody else would ever have dreamed of such a thing. Thank you, thank you! I can never thank you enough. Oh, Mariana, how it humiliates me, and how it makes me happy! Because it is charity, I know that it is charity, but blessed be the charity of your hands, of your heart, because it is yours, and blessed, too, be you yourself, a hundred thousand times! [*Passionately.*] You are my life, my soul! The only reason for my existence!

MARIANA. [*Greatly surprised.*] John!

JOHN. Yes, the only one. Didn't you know? The

only one! But of course you did. Say yes, you did, my own!

MARIANA. No, John, no.

JOHN. Yes, Mariana.

MARIANA. But, then—

JOHN. Yes, I love you, I adore you, I am mad over you, head over heels in love with you, lost irretrievably!

MARIANA. Don't say that!

JOHN. I have loved you all my life.

MARIANA. No, no!

JOHN. Didn't you know it?

MARIANA. I don't want to know it.

JOHN. Why not?

MARIANA. Because it is ridiculous—no, not exactly ridiculous, but it is a pity; I am awfully sorry.

JOHN. Do you mean that you do not love me?

MARIANA. [*Somewhat more composed.*] No. Forgive me, John. I do love you. I love you very much, very, very much more than I love my father, more than I do my grandmothers, but then—I don't love you.

JOHN. Mariana!

MARIANA. I love you more than anybody else in the world, but not like that—not like that. [*She begins to cry.*]

JOHN. Don't cry; you will break my heart. Do—do you love someone else?

MARIANA. No, nobody. Honestly, I don't love anybody.

JOHN. Then—

MARIANA. But I shall some day—I am going to love somebody.

JOHN. Whom?

MARIANA. I don't know. Whoever it is, somebody—not anybody, somebody.

JOHN. But why not me, Mariana?

MARIANA. Because I can't. I tell you, because I love

you so. I don't want you to say that I have deceived you.

JOHN. You must have a very poor opinion of me.

MARIANA. A poor opinion of you? You are the best man in the world.

JOHN. Must you say that, too?

MARIANA. It is true.

JOHN. It only makes it worse.

MARIANA. John, John! Lift up your head. Look at me, John!

JOHN. Is it possible? Can it be?

MARIANA. Why, did you think that I—

JOHN. I don't know. When I thought of it, it did seem incredible, with this miserable luck of mine, but I felt that you were so close to me, that you were so entirely my own—or that I was yours, I don't know which—and you were so good to me, so kind, so much the woman! All the happiness I have ever known in my life until now, has sprung from you—it may have been only a little, now and then, in small things, trifles, help, advice. It was presumptuous of me, Mariana, but I am so accustomed to relying upon you, that I imagined that the treasure was all mine. Besides, I love you so—I mean I need you so. Why should you not be all goodness, Mariana, and take me like a little child into your life, like a toy that you play with, or a dog of which you are fond? But let me be yours, all yours, because I love you! If you could love me only a little, I should be satisfied.

MARIANA. A little is not enough. To be husband and wife, if that is what you mean, we should have to love each other a great deal and in a different way.

JOHN. How?

MARIANA. I love you tremendously, you and everything that is yours, because it is yours—your mother, your house, yes, and your father, or, because—well, I would give my life to help you. If anybody said anything against you, I should knock him down. To save your family, I would starve. Even your name, your title which will

be yours very soon, seem to me so noble, so dignified—I don't know how to explain it, but I just don't want to marry you, because—because—you must not be angry, but I think I am cleverer than you are.

JOHN. You are a great deal cleverer than I.

MARIANA. No, I don't mean exactly cleverer; I am quicker than you are.

JOHN. No, you are cleverer and you are braver than I. Besides you are good and beautiful. I am nothing but a poor devil, an unlucky fellow!

MARIANA. No, you are not. You know a great deal more than I do. You know all about books and all about art. You are a handsomer man than I am a woman. I am crude. My hands are red and yours are white. Then, you are so fastidious, you have such good taste. If it had not been for you, I am sure that I should always have dressed like a gay masquerader. You amount to a great deal more than I do; there is more to you.

JOHN. Yet, although there is so much to me, I am not your ideal.

MARIANA. No, I have no ideal. Don't think that I am so romantic.

JOHN. Well, enough of this talk! What sort of man do you want for a husband?

MARIANA. I don't know. Wait and see. You always lean on me when we walk out into the country—I always have to help you up the hills. Well, the man who is my husband will run up the hills and carry me along in his arms.

JOHN. I will do my best.

MARIANA. Hills are symbolic of so many things!

JOHN. Ah, me!

MARIANA. I simply cannot bear to make you unhappy—but I suppose I must; there is no escape. I should never dream of asking you to carry me; I feel that I was born to take care of you. When your head aches, I always wish it was mine. You are older than I am, but it seems

to me that you must be a great deal younger; I feel as if you were my child.

JOHN. Don't say that.

MARIANA. Why not?

JOHN. Because all this love of yours, which you say you feel, which is so great, so deep, is nothing but contempt—loathing and contempt.

MARIANA. No, it is not!

JOHN. Or pity, I don't know which is worse.

[*A brief pause.*]

MARIANA. Oh, but I am so angry!

JOHN. Why?

MARIANA. To think that another woman hasn't done this to you, and then I could have consoled you afterward!

JOHN. No, Mariana, if another woman had made me suffer as you have because I loved her as I love you, even you could not have consoled me.

MARIANA. It would have been the first time. [*Drawing nearer to him.*] Don't be foolish, John; think it over, and control yourself. You don't love me as much as you think you do. If you had really been mad over me, you would have told me so before; you could never have remained silent through all these years.

JOHN. [*Tenderly.*] Don't talk nonsense.

MARIANA. Only you didn't know where else to turn to find one misfortune more. Now you can say that you have been unlucky even in love. How could two people love each other who have lived together all their lives like brother and sister? Love must come from outside, all of a sudden, from somewhere else—what is the matter? Don't you feel well? Are you ill? John, for Heaven's sake, don't take it like this! I'll have to say yes, if you do, out of pity, and then both of us will be unhappy—yes, both! John! John!

JOHN. [*Rising.*] Never mind. It is over now. You are right, your children ought not to carry the poison of

a degenerate blood in their veins, they must not be born to the curse of a decaying, a contaminated race. You splendid woman, you are right to refuse a hand that is bloodless and cold.

MARIANA. How can you talk like that?

JOHN. Enough! Leave me—yes, I mean it. Then, you can come back. Leave me alone a moment, until I can collect myself, until I can persuade myself that today is to be again like yesterday—that nothing has taken place between us.

[She retires slowly, looking back at him as she goes. When she reaches the top of the steps, she pauses, hesitating, before entering the house.]

MARIANA. I am so sorry! Poor John! *[Stamping her foot.]* But it is not my fault. What a pity!

[She disappears into the house. JOHN remains alone, seated, attempting to compose himself. A bell rings at the garden gate, but no one answers it. After a moment, it rings again. Presently, ANTONIO pushes the gate open and advances into the garden. He looks about, but discovers no one.]

ANTONIO. Goodness gracious! The house must be enchanted.

[Falling back a little, better to look up at the façade, he collides with the chair which is occupied by JOHN.]

JOHN turns sharply in great annoyance.]

JOHN. Eh? What is this?

ANTONIO. I beg your pardon. *[Recognizing JOHN.]* John!

JOHN. *[Staring at him for a moment in return.]* Antonio!

ANTONIO. The very man!

JOHN. What are you doing here?

ANTONIO. Come, come! Embrace me!

JOHN. But where did you drop from?

ANTONIO. From your house. Where did you think?

JOHN. From my house? I thought you were in America.

ANTONIO. So I was, but you know a man can return from America—although it seems incredible.

JOHN. But what are you doing here? Have you lost anything?

ANTONIO. Nothing to speak of, my son; my heart, that is all. And I have a presentiment that if I can find it here, I shall encounter eternal happiness as well. I stopped off to have a look at you by the way—pardon my insistence on my own affairs—I thought, perhaps, you might introduce me; I did not wish to enter paradise unannounced. Your friend is charming, my boy! And charming does not express it. She is beautiful, she is glorious, she is irresistible, she is unique! One woman among ten thousand! By the way, I don't suppose you happen to be engaged?

JOHN. Engaged? What makes you say that? Explain yourself. Don't talk like an ass.

ANTONIO. Are you always so good natured when you wake up from a nap?

JOHN. A nap?

ANTONIO. You were asleep when I came in—now don't deny it. I rang the bell, I can't say how often. Then I called, I don't know how many times. Lucky devil!

JOHN. I?

ANTONIO. Yes, to be able to sleep in immediate proximity to this marvel of the ages. But you are used to it—it is force of habit. O, Mariana, Mariana!

JOHN. What business have you with Mariana?

ANTONIO. None, unfortunately, up to the present. I am mad over her.

JOHN. Absurd!

ANTONIO. Do you suppose that all men are like you—incombustible? I saw her yesterday for the first time—now don't you laugh—and I cannot live another hour without her. How do you manage not to fall in love? You have lived near her all your life.

JOHN. Well, perhaps that may be the reason. How can two people love each other who have lived together like brother and sister ever since they were children? Love must come from the outside, all of a sudden, from somewhere else—

ANTONIO. Like lightning! That's a fact. That is the way it was with me. Didn't you notice when I came in that I had been struck by it? How can a man fall in love, my boy, in twenty-four hours—no, in less—in a night, lying awake, dreaming of her? She hasn't another sweet-heart, has she? Pardon the question; it interests me . . .

JOHN. No, none, whatever, but she is going to have one.

ANTONIO. Who?

JOHN. [*With exceeding ill grace, annoyed.*] How do I know?—somebody, anybody.

ANTONIO. Is that so? You seem to be pretty well acquainted, you are great friends, of course. What sort of person—you don't mind my asking these questions in confidence—what sort of person does she seem to prefer? If it is not too much trouble—

JOHN. No indeed! Don't consider me, anyhow. What do you care?

ANTONIO. I knew you were a friend of mine.

JOHN. As you say.

ANTONIO. This ideal which she has formed in her mind—does it happen to present any resemblance to me? For if it does—

JOHN. Her ideal? Could you run up a hill with her in your arms?

ANTONIO. And jump over the moon with her in them, and then back again, and run up to the top a second time without stopping to take breath!

JOHN. Well, that is just her ideal of a man. Good-bye and good luck!

[*He goes out.*]

ANTONIO. John! Where are you going? One mo-

ment! Wait! What shall I do without you? I must be introduced. [*The garden gate slams, causing the bell to ring violently.*] What is the matter with him? Is it possible that they can be engaged? No, or he would have said so, or else have knocked me over the head. I wonder—

[*MARIANA appears at the top of the steps.*]

MARIANA. John, John! Where are you?

ANTONIO. He is not here, señorita, but I am—if I can be of service—

MARIANA. Oh! [*She comes down the steps.*] How do you do?

ANTONIO. Pleasant morning, isn't it? Fine! Yes, indeed!

MARIANA. Do you wish anything?

ANTONIO. Nothing. [*Continuing, as she makes a gesture of surprise.*] Nothing, now that I have seen you.

MARIANA. [*Laughing.*] Oh!

ANTONIO. Don't you believe me?

MARIANA. Naturally.

ANTONIO. But how can you take it so calmly?

MARIANA. Surely you did not expect me to be greatly surprised?

ANTONIO. Of course not; you are accustomed to it.

MARIANA. To what?

ANTONIO. To admiration which is fervent.

MARIANA. Nobody has ever killed himself for my sake.

ANTONIO. You do not know me.

MARIANA. I remember—aren't you the man who passed on horseback yesterday afternoon, as I was standing at my cousin's gate?

ANTONIO. *Si, señora*, I am the man.

MARIANA. Were you on the beach afterward when we finished playing tennis?

ANTONIO. And after that I was on the float when you got out of the boat. Yes, indeed, I was there—at your service.

MARIANA. You are a stranger here?

ANTONIO. No, I was born here.

MARIANA. Then why did you stop at the gate to ask me the way?

ANTONIO. I was anxious to learn whether your voice was as sweet as your face.

MARIANA. I never saw you until yesterday.

ANTONIO. I have been five years in America, and home again only two weeks.

MARIANA. Where did you keep yourself before you went to America?

ANTONIO. You have often seen me, although, perhaps, you may not remember it.

MARIANA. I wonder—yes. No! What is your name?

ANTONIO. Antonio Losada.

MARIANA. Are you Antonio Losada? With that moustache?

ANTONIO. Yes, indeed. America is a wonderful country for hair.

MARIANA. [*Laughing.*] But then, of course, you know John?

ANTONIO. Of course! We went to school together with the *Escolapios*, and we were suspended together at the University—that is, the first time.

MARIANA. I remember. In Roman Law?

ANTONIO. No, Canon Law.

MARIANA. But that wasn't the first time.

ANTONIO. Right again! You remember better than I do.

MARIANA. Poor John!

ANTONIO. Poor John!

MARIANA. What makes you say "Poor John"?

ANTONIO. You said it first.

MARIANA. I was not thinking. Poor John!

ANTONIO. Perhaps if you could forget him a little, and sympathize with me—

MARIANA. Oh! Are you in trouble?

ANTONIO. Terrible trouble.

MARIANA. Nobody would ever suspect it from your face.

ANTONIO. No, it is more deeply seated; there is nothing the matter with my face.

MARIANA. I hope it is not your heart.

ANTONIO. It might be, for all you know.

MARIANA. Has it pained you very long?

ANTONIO. Since the beginning of the world.

MARIANA. That is a very long time.

ANTONIO. And not one day less. When God made up his mind to create the universe, he jotted down in his note-book that I was predestined, after centuries and centuries had passed, to suffer torment because of two beautiful black eyes which I am gazing into now.

MARIANA. Very likely. Can't you ever be serious?

ANTONIO. Very. Will you marry me?

MARIANA. *Ave Maria!* God bless us! You frighten me out of my wits.

ANTONIO. Am I as unattractive as that?

MARIANA. [*Looking at him.*] No, I do not object to your looks.

ANTONIO. Thanks.

MARIANA. Thanks for what? Besides, looks are of no importance anyway.

ANTONIO. Certainly not. Would you mind telling me what is of importance?

MARIANA. Have you a cough?

ANTONIO. No, I never cough.

MARIANA. Are you subject to headaches?

ANTONIO. Yes, I had a headache once when I was a boy. Another boy cracked me on the head with a stone.

MARIANA. Oh, then you must be quarrelsome?

ANTONIO. I am; fairly so—when I can't get what I want.

MARIANA. What you want, or what you ought to get?

ANTONIO. Will you tell me the difference?

MARIANA. Don't you know?

ANTONIO. No. Neither do you.

MARIANA. I?

ANTONIO. You always get what you want; I can see it in your face.

MARIANA. Then you must be clairvoyant.

ANTONIO. Love sees at a distance; it penetrates.

MARIANA. Not at all. Love is blind.

ANTONIO. That was in the old days; but now it has been operated upon, and we have removed the cataracts.

MARIANA. Only imagine the sights that that poor boy must see!

ANTONIO. Some of them very nice, no doubt, beginning with you.

MARIANA. But where will he leave off?

ANTONIO. With you, too. After encircling the globe and seeing everything, he will come back to you.

MARIANA. After encircling the globe?

ANTONIO. What do you say? Shall we go along?

MARIANA. I warn you that he would find me an extremely disagreeable traveling companion.

ANTONIO. In what way?

MARIANA. I should expect too much of him.

ANTONIO. Expect it of me, then, and you will not be disappointed.

MARIANA. Never?

ANTONIO. Never.

MARIANA. Suppose that what I have set my heart on proves difficult to get?

ANTONIO. I will get it.

MARIANA. But suppose it does not exist?

ANTONIO. I will invent it.

MARIANA. Suppose that it costs you your life to obtain it?

ANTONIO. I shall give up my life, and then come straight back to life again, for you may be perfectly certain that I shall never leave the world as long as it contains you.

MARIANA. Not even if I marry some one else?

ANTONIO. John?

MARIANA. No, I shall never marry John, but the man who marries me must take care of him and protect him, for I shall always have him around. You are not laughing at John?

ANTONIO. By no means.

MARIANA. Because it is not safe to laugh at him. Wherever I go, he is coming along. Whatever I have, I mean to share it with him; my house shall be his house, and whenever he calls, I shall rush to his side.

ANTONIO. Yet the man complains of his fate!

MARIANA. He is a privileged person. Besides, I don't want you to be jealous. You must not be ridiculous. John is John.

ANTONIO. From this hour forth evermore. Anything else?

MARIANA. If I marry—

ANTONIO. If you marry!

MARIANA. I must have ten children, all boys.

ANTONIO. [*As a matter of course.*] Anything else?

MARIANA. I thought perhaps that might be enough.

ANTONIO. Why not add a couple of girls while we are about it, if it is not inconvenient, so that the breed of valiant women shall not become extinct?

MARIANA. Are you laughing at me?

ANTONIO. No, only I think we had better hurry. We are wasting valuable time.

MARIANA. I don't know. What are you doing?

ANTONIO. Loving you madly, passionately. I have been doing nothing else since yesterday, at eight o'clock in the morning.

MARIANA. I mean, what are you doing for a living?

ANTONIO. Why not do anything that happens along? Don't you think that with courage and a little luck, pretty nearly anything would do?

MARIANA. Yes, but—

ANTONIO. In America, my dear, I did a little of everything; I grew tobacco, I canned meat, I raised cane.

MARIANA. How perfectly dreadful! I am sure you must have thrown your money away.

ANTONIO. Dreadful? It was fine! I made lots of it.

MARIANA. You must be very rich, then.

ANTONIO. No, I enjoyed life as I went along. I shall be rich, however, when I marry you.

MARIANA. Do you plan to turn miser at my expense, when it is your duty to support me?

ANTONIO. Not miser, precisely; although we shall need to be economical if we are to provide for the boys.

MARIANA. [*Laughing.*] When do you expect to return to America?

ANTONIO. I expect to return—when, I don't know. As I shall not sail without you, perhaps I shall remain ashore.

MARIANA. I hope you don't think that I am afraid of the water?

ANTONIO. You? No, indeed! But John might be sea-sick.

MARIANA. [*Laughing.*] You are a real man. [*Holding out her hand.*]

ANTONIO. [*Kissing it.*] And you are an angel!

MARIANA. So you think now.

ANTONIO. Yes . . . will see you later.

[*Shouts and confusion outside.*]

VOICES. No, no! Here—not that way!

MARIANA. What has happened?

[MAMÁ INÉS and MAMÁ PEPA rush in from the gallery, greatly agitated, followed by two servants. DON CARLOS and a group of factory hands enter simultaneously at the garden gate. They carry JOHN in their arms, covering him up with a poncho which

conceals him from view almost completely. They lay him down upon the chaise longue, where MARIANA and the other women surround him. Meanwhile the dialogue proceeds with great rapidity, almost all speaking at the same time.]

DON CARLOS. This way! This way! In here. . .

MAMÁ INÉS. John!

MAMÁ PEPA. John!

MARIANA. Why, John!

MAMÁ INÉS. God bless us! An accident?

MARIANA. John! John! Can't you speak? Look at me! What have you done? What is the matter? Can't you answer?

DON CARLOS. He is unconscious, my dear. He is not able to talk.

MAMÁ INÉS. Mercy on us! A terrible calamity!

MAMÁ PEPA. He was a fine young man.

A MAID. Oh, he was lovely!

SECOND MAID. He was so handsome!

DON CARLOS. Ladies, he is not dead yet.

MAMÁ INÉS. But he is going to die.

MAMÁ PEPA. Nothing of the sort, unless his time has come—which may be now.

FIRST MAID. He has opened his eyes.

MAMÁ INÉS. Quick! Run for a cup of hot broth.

ANTONIO. I should suggest a nip of cognac.

MAMÁ INÉS. Give him a warm punch.

MARIANA. [*At the table.*] Yes, strike a match.

MAMÁ PEPA. [*To one of the maids.*] Bring some rum.

MAMÁ INÉS. But how did it happen? Why don't you tell us?

FIRST FACTORY HAND. It was nothing much. He was walking up along the edge of the cliff, and he toppled over into the sea. That's all.

SECOND FACTORY HAND. He didn't fall, I tell you; I saw him jump.

MAMÁ PEPA and MAMÁ INÉS. God have mercy on our souls!

FIRST FACTORY HAND. I tell you I saw him topple off the edge of the cliff.

SECOND FACTORY HAND. I tell you I saw him jump. How could he fall when the track there is wide enough for a team?

FIRST FACTORY HAND. He got dizzy.

MARIANA. Yes, but who pulled him out of the water?

FIRST FACTORY HAND. Nobody, because he fell plop into Little John's boat, which was tied up there below the rock, waiting to catch lobsters.

MAMÁ PEPA. Praise God and bless His Holy Name!

MAMÁ INÉS. If he isn't drowned, then what on earth is the matter with him?

FIRST FACTORY HAND. He fell fifty feet, lady, which is plenty to give a man a bit of shock.

FIRST MAID. [*Entering.*] The punch!

MARIANA. Give it to me. [*She goes up to JOHN and forces the punch into his mouth.*] Drink this! Here, more, more. Do you feel very badly? [*JOHN coughs.*] He coughs—naturally, after the wetting.

JOHN. [*Faintly.*] No, I didn't get wet. The water splashed into the boat; it tipped a little when I came down, that was all. I am all right now, thanks; don't worry. Forgive me—

MAMÁ INÉS. You did give us a nice fright!

DON CARLOS. Everybody pass into the house and take something. [*To MAMÁ PEPA.*] See what you can do.

MAMÁ PEPA. Come with me.

FIRST FACTORY HAND. [*To JOHN.*] All right, son. Glad it wasn't any worse.

SECOND FACTORY HAND. Better luck next time,

[*All pass into the house except MARIANA, ANTONIO and JOHN.*]

MARIANA. [*In a low voice.*] Did—did you really commit suicide?

JOHN. Yes, really. And even then I had bad luck.

MARIANA. A nice way to celebrate my birthday, making it as unpleasant for me as you can!

JOHN. I am sorry, but the temptation to leave this scurvy world was too strong.

MARIANA. Promise never to do it again!

JOHN. What good would it do if I did?

ANTONIO. [*Advancing sympathetically.*] Well, well, man! What was the trouble?

MARIANA. Nothing. He was walking along the edge of the cliff, and grew dizzy.

JOHN. [*To ANTONIO.*] What! You here yet?

ANTONIO. Yes, indeed! No sooner were you out of the way, than she appeared, so I—

MARIANA. Exactly. I appeared, so he—

JOHN. Say no more! It was foreordained.

MARIANA. Yes, he dropped from the clouds, as it were.

JOHN. [*Forcing a smile.*] When—when is the happy day?

ANTONIO. Whenever she fixes the date.

MARIANA. Oh, there is no hurry.

ANTONIO. No hurry?

MARIANA. We have so much to do before we sail.

JOHN. Sail?

MARIANA. Yes, Antonio feels that we must return to America.

ANTONIO. But you are coming along.

JOHN. I?

ANTONIO. Yes. You are to be godfather to the first of our ten. We are planning to christen him John.

MARIANA. That is if, as we hope—

JOHN. No, no, never! Impossible! . . .

MARIANA. What makes you think so?

JOHN. Because if he inherits my luck with my name, the poor wretch will not be able even to drown. Besides, when things go wrong with him, I don't want to hear you saying forever: "Poor John!"

MARIANA. No, and we ought not to say it to you either. [*Moving away unconsciously.*] Poor John!

ANTONIO. Poor John!

CURTAIN

MADAME PEPITA
COMEDY IN THREE ACTS
TEATRO DE LA COMEDIA, MADRID
1912

TO RICARDO LEON

CHARACTERS

MADAME PEPITA, *aged 38.*

CATALINA, *aged 17.*

GALATEA, *aged 25*

CARMEN, *aged 28.*

CRISTINA, *aged 16.*

A SEWING GIRL, *aged 20.*

DON GUILLERMO, *aged 40.*

ALBERTO, *aged 22.*

DON LUIS, *aged 55.*

AUGUSTO, *aged 25.*

ANDRÉS, *aged 30.*



ACT I

Reception salon in the establishment of MADAME PEPITA, a fashionable dressmaker. The room is elaborately fitted out with gold furniture, upholstered in silk, but too elaborate for good taste. In the centre and at the right, small tables strewn with fashion magazines, colored plates of French and Viennese models and samples of materials such as wholesale houses supply to dressmakers. A large three panelled mirror, in front of a pier glass reaching to the floor, points to the fact that, on busy days, the salon is pressed into service as a fitting room also. One or two smart hats hang about on high stands; almost in the centre of the stage is a dress-form, on which is draped an elaborate evening gown.

At the rise of the curtain, CARMEN, one of MADAME PEPITA's fitters, is kneeling before the form, pinning a design of flowers and foliage on the gown. She pauses every now and then to compare the result with the fashion plate which she takes from the floor at her side, in order to examine it more closely. CRISTINA stands near by, handing her pins from a small box, besides flowers and buds from a large carton which is placed on a chair.

CARMEN, a smart looking young person of the type employed in the better dressmaking establishments of Madrid, wears a black frock set off with a small white apron. Her shoes are neat and her hair and general appearance faultlessly correct.

CRISTINA, an apprentice, still in short skirts, is well-groomed and smart. Both girls speak with the easy sophistication of the capital, but without marked vulgarity.

CARMEN. Give me a pin, a rose, a bud . . . quick!

CRISTINA. You're not in any hurry, are you?

CARMEN. Well, you'll see what will happen if the Snapdragon appears upon the scene, and this dress isn't finished.

[CATALINA, a girl of seventeen, enters, innocent and attractive in appearance. She is horribly dressed, and her hair is done frightfully. Although her clothes are well cut and of good material, her skirt is on crooked and dips down on one side, her blouse gapes where it fastens, and her apron, which is made of lace and batiste of excellent quality, is decorated with a huge ink spot. Her skirt is neither long nor short, while her hair hangs loose, except for a large bow tied where it does the least good. In moments of abstraction, she bites her nails furiously. In one hand she carries a book. Her conversation is that of a spoiled child who is aware of her importance as daughter of the head of the establishment.]

CATALINA. [Entering, overhearing CARMEN's last words.] See here, you needn't call my mother the Snap-dragon. She has a name, like everybody else.

CARMEN. Dearie, you're a sweet ghost—you always appear when you're not wanted.

CATALINA. Whether I'm wanted or not, is none of your business.

CARMEN. Excuse me, dearie.

CATALINA. [Walking over and seating herself in an armchair.] You needn't excuse yourself, but be a little careful what you say; I'm here. [Cuddling herself down into the chair like a cat.] And I'm not as silly as you think.

[She opens the book and begins to read to herself, evidently with great difficulty.]

CARMEN. [Under her breath.] Little Miss-Know-It-All is not as silly as you think.

CATALINA. [Turning quickly.] See here! You

needn't call me Little-Miss Know-It-All. I've got a name, like everybody else.

CARMEN. What you've got is a consumptive's quick ear.

CATALINA. [*Much offended.*] Consumptive yourself.

CRISTINA. [*Intervening.*] Ah, now, don't be cross. It was only a joke.

CATALINA. [*Immediately appeased.*] That's all right, but be a little careful with your jokes. My name is Catalina, I'll have you know, and my mother is not the Snapdragon, she's the Señora, the head of this establishment.

CARMEN. [*Maliciously.*] The madam.

CATALINA. No, sir, not the madam—Madame Pepita, which is very different. [*Insisting.*] Madame, Pepita, Madame Pepita!

CARMEN. We heard you, dearie. [*Maliciously.*] Well, then, if Madame Pepita comes in and this trimming isn't finished, [*Emphasizing every word.*] *the head of this establishment* is going to create a disturbance that will make a hurricane seem tame.

CATALINA. And quite right, too, because you're lazy things, all of you.

CARMEN. Wise talk, eh, from the pet of the house?

CRISTINA. Why don't you turn in and help?

CATALINA. [*Scornfully.*] I? You've got cheek. [*Turning her back, she begins to read again, applying herself laboriously, pronouncing each syllable as children do when they learn.*] "The hu-man bod-y con-sists of three parts: head, trunk, and ex-trem-i-ties," [*Repeating, without looking at the book*] "The human body consists of three . . ."

[*A bell rings at the entrance, which is at the head of the stairs.*]

CARMEN. [*To CRISTINA.*] Look and see who is coming. The doorbell rang.

CRISTINA. [*Glancing toward the door upon the right.*] It's the boy from the silk shop.

[ALBERTO appears in the doorway. He is a youth of twenty-two, unusually well-educated, of good family, whom reverses have obliged to seek employment as clerk in "La Sultana," silk, lace and haberdashery shop. He dresses plainly but respectably, and displays the excessive timidity of a person who feels himself above his position. He is delivering a number of large boxes containing laces.]

ALBERTO. [*Hesitating before he enters.*] May I? With your permission . . . I beg your pardon . . . [*The two girls do not answer, as they are busy laughing.*] Good morning. . . .

CATALINA. [*Raising her eyes from her book, instantly attracted by the young man. As the scene progresses, little by little her attitude alters from sympathy to admiration. The actress should mark the transition simply and ingenuously, as the girl's innocence does not permit her to realize its significance.*] Good morning. Did you wish anything?

ALBERTO. [*Advancing a few steps, smiling timidly.*] Here are the laces from "La Sultana," so that you may select what is required.

CARMEN. Very well, you may leave them and return a little later.

ALBERTO. [*Timidly.*] But . . . pardon me. The proprietor wishes me to bring back what you do not desire. When all the laces are here, and ladies call at the shop, naturally we have nothing to show.

CARMEN. Well, madame has a fitting at present; she has no time to make selections now.

CRISTINA. The idea! You wouldn't refuse to oblige a lady, would you, just because your employer tells you to?

ALBERTO. No, indeed! I shall retire, then, with your permission, and return later.

[*Backing awkwardly toward the door, in his embarrassment he collides with a chair, which, in falling,*

carries with it a table loaded with fashion plates, both crashing down together. Greatly disconcerted, ALBERTO attempts to gather up the scattered papers, becomes entangled, proceeds to extricate himself, finally almost falling in his turn. The two girls burst out laughing, while CATALINA rushes toward him with a cry.]

CATALINA. [*Hurrying to ALBERTO.*] Oh! Did you hurt yourself?

ALBERTO. [*Smiling, in spite of his confusion, but looking askance at the two girls, who are still laughing.*] No, señorita. Thank you very much.

CATALINA. Won't you let me get you a glass of cold water?

ALBERTO. Oh, no, señorita! It is quite unnecessary.

[*The girls continue to laugh.*]

CATALINA. [*Turning to the girls.*] I don't see what you are laughing at.

CARMEN. Can't we laugh if we feel like it?

CATALINA. Not when there's nothing to laugh at.

ALBERTO. Never mind, señorita, they are laughing at me. When a man trips, it invariably amuses the ladies. I suppose it seems only natural.

CRISTINA. Yes, we can't teach you anything.

CATALINA. [*To ALBERTO, confidentially.*] They're stupid things, both of them.

ALBERTO. [*Gratefully.*] You are an angel, señorita.

CATALINA. [*Drawing away, half shyly, half surprised.*] Am I?

[*During this episode, the girls have returned to their task of trimming the gown. CARMEN, kneeling on the floor, leans backward better to sense the effect, and presently makes a gesture of dissatisfaction.*]

CARMEN. This can't be right.

CRISTINA. I don't think so, either. It's too broad; there's too much of it.

CARMEN. [*Rising and taking the sketch in her hand.*]

Well, it is exactly like the drawing, and that is awfully smart. I don't know what it is.

ALBERTO. [*Interrupting.*] Pardon me—[*Snatching the sketch from CARMEN, who looks up, astonished.*] The lines of this model were designed for the ideal woman, a woman with a figure built on Gothic lines. [*His self-assurance now offers a striking contrast to his former embarrassment.*]

ALL. What?

ALBERTO. [*Smiling, looking from one to the other, as if making a demonstration in mathematics.*] I mean to say that she has very long legs.

CARMEN. Say, now!

ALBERTO. I am sure of it. [*Estimating the height of the plate with his eye, and measuring it off with one finger, as painters do.*] One, two, three. . . . We have exactly eight heads.

CRISTINA. Eight heads?

ALBERTO. [*Smiling pleasantly.*] Yes, señorita, that is, in total height; and the lady for whom you are making this gown must be only— [*Glancing at the dress-form.*] Let me see. One . . . two . . . three . . . we may give her five and a half. [*With perfect assurance.*]

CRISTINA. Five and a half? Heads?

CARMEN. [*Sarcastically.*] Five and a half heads ought to seem a lot to you.

ALBERTO. [*Intensely serious.*] No, not at all. Five and a half are not nearly enough. The ideally proportioned figure has a total height of seven heads—that is the Greek type in all its purity and elegance. French and Viennese models always exaggerate somewhat, but Spanish women, particularly here in Madrid, are rather Romanesque in contour, like—like you, señorita. [*To CRISTINA.*]

CARMEN. [*Laughs.*]

CRISTINA. [*Offended.*] Like me?

ALBERTO. Don't be offended. I mean wide and thick. So, when we attempt to adapt the ideal lines of the model

to the shapes which we actually see, the result is ridiculous. [*Waxing eloquent, as he studies the garment.*] Three parallel rows of trimming on a short skirt? Horrible! And the pity of it is that just as long as women neglect to study the divine mysteries of line, they will continue to go about looking as if their worst enemies had designed their clothes. It breaks a man's heart to go out for a walk and meet masterpieces of the Creator transformed into monstrosities by the sacrilegious, criminal hands of tailors and dressmakers.

CRISTINA. [*Laughs.*]

CARMEN. [*Half amused, half angry.*] What was that about tailors and dressmakers?

ALBERTO. [*Recollecting himself, his customary timidity returning as he realizes what he has said.*] Please excuse me. I wasn't thinking of you.

CATALINA. [*Who has been listening in openmouthed admiration.*] But who are you? How do you know so much?

ALBERTO. I am nobody, señorita; I amount to nothing. Only I draw a little, I sketch, and I hope to become a painter, some day. In the meantime, I am working in "La Sultana," silk, lace and haberdashery shop. I shall retire, now, with your permission, ladies. . . .

[*Goes out. A moment of astonished silence follows.*]

CARMEN. [*Laughing.*] What do you think of that?

CRISTINA. He's a scream.

CATALINA. [*Earnestly.*] I don't see what makes you call him a scream. I think he's awfully nice and attractive.

CARMEN. Ahem! Attractive and everything else. So Don Simplicity has turned your head, has he?

CATALINA. [*Almost in tears.*] I don't see what makes you call him Don Simplicity. He's got a name, like everybody else.

CARMEN. But we don't know his name.

CRISTINA. Yes, we do; it's Alberto.

CATALINA. [*To herself.*] Alberto? What a nice name! [*MADAME PEPITA is heard talking outside.*] Oh, here comes mamma!

CARMEN. [*Resuming work precipitately.*] Good-bye my wages! [*To CRISTINA.*] Give me another pin.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Outside.*] Yes, yes! I tell you, yes!

A SEWING GIRL. [*Outside.*] But, Madame—

[*MADAME PEPITA enters. She is still a fine looking woman. Her tailored suit is strictly in the mode, and her coiffure arranged with extreme care. She carries an elaborately trimmed sleeve in one hand, talking and gesticulating immoderately as she enters, evidently in great annoyance. At the same time, she is careful to maintain a noticeable affectation of refinement. The Sewing Girl follows deferentially.*]

MADAME PEPITA. There is no "but" about it. I tell you the sleeve is a botch, and a botch it is. You'll rip it this very minute, and baste it over again and say nothing, and if that doesn't suit you, you can go. The idea of a little monkey like you presuming to differ with me in a matter of taste!

SEWING GIRL. But I didn't say anything.

MADAME PEPITA. So much the better! Here, take your sleeve. [*Throws it at the girl, who catches it.*] The thing's a nightmare—it's about as *chic* as you are. To think I pay this girl six pesetas a week!

SEWING GIRL. [*Between her teeth, as she goes out.*] Any one who stands you ought to be paid six hundred.

CATALINA. [*Going up to MADAME PEPITA.*] Mamma, do you hear what she says? She says any one who stands you ought to be paid six hundred.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Brusquely.*] Is that your business?

CATALINA. [*Completely cowed.*] Oh!

MADAME PEPITA. [*Approaching CARMEN and CRIS-*

ina.] What are you doing? Wasting time—as usual? Why aren't you in the workroom?

CARMEN. We were finishing this gown for exhibition.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Examining the model through her lorgnette, which is attached to an extravagantly bejewelled chain.*] And a sweet exhibition it is!

CARMEN. Don't you like it?

MADAME PEPITA. It might do for the patron saint of your village, which is in the back country—way back, if one is to judge by the taste.

CARMEN. I was born in Madrid, the same as you.

MADAME PEPITA. Then, my dear, your taste is bad naturally.

CARMEN. It's an exact copy of the model as you ordered. Won't you look?

[*Hands her the sketch. MADAME PEPITA examines the gown and the model alternately through her lorgnette.*]

CATALINA. [*Breaking in, eagerly, perfectly sure of herself.*] But the model was designed for a woman built on Gothic lines.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Looking at her daughter, alarmed.*] What's that?

CATALINA. [*Positively.*] Of course! And the lady who ordered this is Romanesque.

MADAME PEPITA. What are you talking about?

CATALINA. Yes, Romanesque. She has only seven heads, and to be true to type, with perfect proportion, you must have. . . . [*Stops to think.*] Oh, a great many more—I don't know just how many; and if you put three rows of trimming on a short skirt, why, the woman who wears it will go around looking like a Greek monstrosity whose worst enemy has made her clothes. There! Just see if I'm not right. [*Breaks off suddenly.*]

MADAME PEPITA. [*Alarmed.*] Child, have you a temperature? Come here, let me see.

CATALINA. No, mamma!

CARMEN *and* CRISTINA. [*Laugh.*]

MADAME PEPITA. [*Angrily.*] What are you laughing at?

CRISTINA. [*Intimidated.*] Nothing, *Madame*.

CARMEN. We just heard all that rigmarole from the boy from "La Sultana."

MADAME PEPITA. Has the boy from "La Sultana" been here?

CARMEN. With the laces.

MADAME PEPITA. The same boy?

CARMEN. No, another one, *Madame*.

MADAME PEPITA. Did you tell him that he was no good and that the proprietor is a cheat and an extortioner?

CARMEN. [*Smiling.*] No, *Madame*.

MADAME PEPITA. You missed a fine opportunity. I'll tell him when I see him.

CATALINA. [*Aroused.*] No, don't you do it, mamma.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Brusquely.*] Is that your business?

CATALINA. [*Moving off, suppressed.*] Oh!

CARMEN. [*Pointing to the dress-form.*] What shall we do with this?

MADAME PEPITA. Take it to pieces and pin it together all over again. But not here. People will be coming soon, and the whole place is a mess. Carry it into the workroom—I'll be there in a minute. Get out of my sight!

CARMEN. [*With her tongue in her cheek.*] Yes, *Madame*. [*Picking up the form with CRISTINA'S help and carrying it out, muttering between her teeth as she does so.*] With the greatest of pleasure.

CATALINA. [*Approaching her mother.*] Mamma, she says "With the greatest of pleasure."

MADAME PEPITA. [*Brusquely.*] Is that your business?

CATALINA. [*Intimidated.*] Oh!

MADAME PEPITA. What are you doing here? Idling?

CATALINA. No, Mamma, I am studying.

MADAME PEPITA. Is that so? Let me see that book. Is it a novel?

CATALINA. [*Protesting.*] No, mamma, it's a book Don Guillermo lent me—don't you know? The gentleman on the floor above. It is, really—if you want to see it. [*Giving her the book.*]

MADAME PEPITA. [*Turning the pages.*] Heavens and earth! What's this? A skeleton?

CATALINA. [*As pleased as a child.*] Yes, mamma. It's a book that tells how many bones we have and how we are made, inside and out.

MADAME PEPITA. Eh?

CATALINA. [*Continuing.*] And what everything inside us is for. [*Reciting.*] "The human body consists of three parts: head, trunk"—

MADAME PEPITA. [*Interrupting, scandalized.*] Hush, hush! That's immoral! Throw the book away this minute. Such things are only for men to know. No decent woman has any occasion to study her insides.

CATALINA. [*Innocently.*] Oh, yes, mamma, she has. Don Guillermo says that women are just the ones who ought to know, so that when they grow up and become mothers, they can nurse their own children, as God intended.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Sincerely shocked.*] The man's a satyr!

CATALINA. [*Innocently.*] Oh, no, mamma, you mustn't say that! He writes articles for the papers, and he's a member of the Academy.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Softening, as if by magic.*] A member of the Academy! Who told you so?

CATALINA. The janitor's wife. She saw it on his letters, and it's on the papers, too, that come to him from the printers: Don Guillermo de Armendáriz y Ochoa, of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, yes, mamma. Besides, he's awfully nice and awfully sweet to me, and he has his rooms all stuffed full of big pieces of stone and statues

that haven't any heads, and whenever he meets me on the stairs he always stops to talk to me, and he's told me he'll lend me books so that I can learn something, because he thinks it's a great pity that I am such a big girl and such an ignoramus, and he asked why didn't you send me to school when I was little, and I told him that you didn't want me to associate with common children, and he says that it is better to be common than to be ignorant, and that's true, isn't it, mamma?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Abstracted, impressed.*] A member of the Academy?

CATALINA. [*Enthusiastically.*] Yes, mamma. And the other day he had his picture in the *Nuevo Mundo* with the King and Queen.

MADAME PEPITA. With the King?

CATALINA. Yes, mamma, at the opening of the picture exhibition; he was there to receive them and explain everything, so that they could tell which were the good pictures and which were the bad ones. You can see them all here for yourself. [*Producing a copy of the Nuevo Mundo, which is concealed among the fashion plates.*] He has medals all over, and wears a sash.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Impressed.*] Probably the Order of Carlos III, or maybe he's María Luisa. [*Mollified, gazing at the photograph.*] How attractive a man does look when he's decorated!

[*The doorbell rings, after which CARMEN's voice is heard outside.*]

CARMEN. [*Outside.*] Yes, Señor Conde. Will the Conde step in? I'll tell Madame. [*Appearing in the doorway, and discovering MADAME PEPITA.*] Oh, here is Madame Pepita! Madame, the Conde de la Vega de Lezo.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Suddenly becoming sweeter than honey.*] Conde! Come in, come right in. [*Giving her daughter a hasty push.*] Go and dress yourself! Don't stand there in the middle of the room—you're a sight.

CATALINA. [*Cowed.*] Oh! [*Runs out, escaping by one door as the CONDE enters by the other.*]

[DON LUIS DE LARA, CONDE DE LA VEGA DE LEZO, though but fifty-five, is in appearance much older, love, wine and other excesses having undermined his health prematurely. Nevertheless, he still affects the airs and graces of the beau, which contrast lamentably with the general decay of his person. He dresses with undue pretense to fashion, carrying himself gallantly in the grand style, although his gestures and poses are marred for the most part by his premature senility. He wobbles and totters and bends forward unexpectedly, which causes him the keenest annoyance. Kissing the girl who opens the door as he enters, he appears to be dispensing a favor. The girl receives the salute with ill-concealed disgust, wiping her face with her apron as soon as the CONDE'S back is turned. Then she goes out.]

DON LUIS. My dearest Pepita!

MADAME PEPITA. I was afraid the Conde had forgotten us. It is three months since we have seen you.

DON LUIS. Oh, my dear, I have been traveling—troubles and worries without number! I have not been well.

MADAME PEPITA. The Conde has been ill?

DON LUIS. Yes, mental anguish, moral suffering; that is all. Society is in bad case, Pepita; the aristocracy has degenerated. Money is replacing blue blood nowadays, and it is prejudiced against the nobility. Poverty devours our vellum riches. We are nobodies.

MADAME PEPITA. Oh, don't say that, Conde! Money cannot purchase blue blood.

DON LUIS. [*Sighing.*] No, blue blood cannot be bought, nor sold either, for that matter.

MADAME PEPITA. Be seated, Conde.

DON LUIS. Ah, Pepita, who would believe that your dear, departed mother had lived in our house, that she had acted as maid to my departed wife?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Unduly affected.*] Your poor wife!

DON LUIS. Yes, you were born in our house, brought up under the protection of my wing. [*Looking about the room.*] But, today, you travel the road to riches, while I. . . .

MADAME PEPITA. [*Countering promptly.*] Conde, I have troubles of my own. Believe me!

DON LUIS. Come, come, don't tell me you'll ever hang for want of a couple of thousand pesetas.

MADAME PEPITA. Conde, what put that idea in your head? A dressmaker invests her entire capital in clothes. These gowns cost me a fortune, and just as soon as the style changes, nobody will look at them. Then, I have to pay wages to no end of girls, and, finally, there are the customers. They grow meaner and meaner every day. Even the actresses and the demi-mondaines, who only a little while ago never dreamed of questioning the price of anything, would you believe it—nowadays the way they scrutinize their bills is something shameful. They know what everything, down to a yard of satin, costs. Why, Conde, I had a lady here the other day, the wife of a cabinet minister—I'd rather not mention her name—who insisted upon supplying her own trimming for a court costume. Fancy! Trimming! To me! [*Greatly outraged.*] What next, I wonder? She said the lace was antique, it had a history. I thought to myself, it's antique all right. As for the history, there's plenty of that that's not so antique, in which your husband figures conspicuously.

DON LUIS. It is the way of the world, Pepita.

MADAME PEPITA. Dressmaking is not what it used to be, Conde.

DON LUIS. Come, come, you have land at Escorial, which is money assured. Everybody knows you have property.

MADAME PEPITA. What good is a little property when you haven't the money to build?

DON LUIS. Your daughter will be one of the finest matches in Spain.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Flattered.*] Oh, Conde, how can you say that?

DON LUIS. I have a soft spot in my heart for you, Pepita.

MADAME PEPITA. Thank you, Conde.

DON LUIS. You are an exceptional woman, enterprising, systematic, who has exquisite taste.

[*At each additional flattery, MADAME PEPITA swells with pride, blushing with excess of emotion.*]
I express my admiration freely whenever I can find the opportunity.

MADAME PEPITA. I am more than grateful, Conde.

DON LUIS. Today, I have come with a purpose.

MADAME PEPITA. Conde!

DON LUIS. A lady will arrive shortly—naturally, at my suggestion—who wishes to order some clothes.

MADAME PEPITA. A relative of the Conde's?

DON LUIS. [*With a superior air.*] No, she is not of my world, socially. Rather, I should say, of the artist class. Her name is Galatea—a stage name, of course. You must have heard of her—something quite out of the ordinary—high class vaudeville, don't you know? Living pictures.

MADAME PEPITA. Oh, yes! Of course!

DON LUIS. Stunning creature! Exquisite! She has been in despair in Madrid over the problem of clothes. She can find nothing appropriate. [*With a deprecatory gesture.*] Finally, I said to her: Why not see Madame Pepita?

MADAME PEPITA. I am overwhelmed, Conde!

DON LUIS. So now she is coming to you. The difficulty is—at least, I assume it is—she treats me like a father, or even more so. Although she is fond of me, there are some subjects we never discuss. However, I am convinced that somewhere, in the background, there must be somebody who pays the bills. Tragic, is it not? But, obviously, that is not our affair.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Innocently.*] Certainly not, as long as they are paid.

DON LUIS. Naturally, that is understood. I might suggest that in fixing the price. . . .

MADAME PEPITA. [*Quickly.*] The Conde knows that my prices are not exorbitant. As the lady is a friend of his . . .

DON LUIS. No, no, that is not it exactly. Permit yourself, for once, the luxury of a few hundred pesetas more or less. Suppose we say a thousand more.

[MADAME PEPITA responds with a gesture of astonishment.]

Times are hard. I could use seven hundred and fifty myself . . . [*Quickly.*] which you may set aside for me when the bill is paid, unless of course, you care to advance them, if it is not inconvenient.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Disconcerted.*] But, Conde—

DON LUIS. [*Affecting depression, pacing up and down the room.*] Sad, Pepita, is it not? Democracy has reduced us to this. A Conde de la Vega de Lezo accepting commissions upon clothes! Think of it! I shed tears.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Capitulating.*] Don't feel too badly, Conde. If there is anything I can do. . . .

DON LUIS. [*Simulating feeling.*] Thanks, Pepita. [*Embracing her.*] I accept it because your heart is pure gold. But it demeans me.

MADAME PEPITA. Not at all, Conde.

[*The door bell rings. GALATEA'S voice is heard.*]

GALATEA. [*Outside.*] Is Madame Pepita in?

DON LUIS. Here she is; I recognize her voice. [*Transported.*] Ah, her voice! [*Advancing to the door.*] This way, Galatea. [*Hurrying forward to offer his hand.*]

[GALATEA, a woman of twenty-five, displays an extremely smart street costume, somewhat over-elaborate, but nevertheless in good taste. Her manners and speech are vulgar, contrasting with her appearance, and

indicating that she has been brought up among the least sensitive of the lower classes.]

GALATEA. [*To the CONDE.*] So you're here, are you?

DON LUIS. [*Obsequious and infatuated, losing all his grand manner at once.*] Yes, I am here, as you see—whispering naughty things about you. I am interested in whatever you do.

GALATEA. Well, I'll have to credit you one for getting up early, and it was cold this morning, too.

DON LUIS. I am capable of any sacrifice for your sake.

GALATEA. The sacrifice will come later, but remember I don't count asthmatic attacks any sacrifice.

DON LUIS. Asthmatic attacks? A great joke!

GALATEA. Is this the Madame Pepita you talk so much about?

MADAME PEPITA. Yes, indeed. At your service.

GALATEA. [*As affable with MADAME PEPITA as she is abrupt with the CONDE.*] I am charmed.

MADAME PEPITA. The pleasure is mine. The Conde informs me that you are very particular in the matter of clothes.

GALATEA. Usually, I think clothes so commonplace.

MADAME PEPITA. I am sure that we have something which will appeal to your tastes.

GALATEA. I suppose you're frightfully expensive?

MADAME PEPITA. Quality is always expensive. However, I do not believe that we shall differ over the price.

DON LUIS. You may have absolute confidence in Pepita. Although not nobly born, she holds herself high.

[Whenever the CONDE speaks, GALATEA stares at him contemptuously, looking him over from head to foot, but he simulates entire obliviousness.]

MADAME PEPITA. You embarrass me, Conde. [*To GALATEA.*] Have you any ideas, or would you prefer to look over some of our models first, so as to see what we have?

GALATEA. Yes, perhaps you might show me something.

MADAME PEPITA. If Madame will step into the other room. . . .

GALATEA. I am anxious to see your display.

DON LUIS. [*Unable to resist.*] Quite right. Step this way!

GALATEA. No, trot along; you're excused. Dress-makers despise nothing so much as men who hang about fitting rooms.

MADAME PEPITA. Oh, no indeed! If it is any pleasure to the Conde. . . .

GALATEA. Well, if you don't mind, I do. That settles it.

DON LUIS. [*Visibly disappointed.*] Always clever and coy!

GALATEA. Yes, it's the way I'm made.

DON LUIS. I must be off, then. I have business of my own to attend to. Does your motor happen to be at the door, by any chance?

GALATEA. What do you want of my motor?

DON LUIS. [*Smiling.*] Nothing of your motor, but I should like permission from you to ride in it, as far as my house.

GALATEA. [*After a moment's hesitation.*] Very well, if you send it right back. Mind that you don't smoke and get my cushions all smelling of tobacco, because, when I'm alone, I don't care to be reminded that there are such things as men in the world. [*Fanning the air with her handkerchief.*] Ouf!

DON LUIS. *Au revoir*, Pepita. Good-bye. By the way, attend to that little matter as soon as possible; the need is urgent.

MADAME PEPITA. I shan't forget, Conde.

[*The CONDE goes out.*]

GALATEA. [*As he disappears, utterly indifferent as to whether he overhears or not.*] Silly ass! Side-splitting, isn't he? And he thinks he's a sport!

MADAME PEPITA. [*Alarmed, fearing the CONDE may*

hear.] Oh, but the Conde is so distinguished! He is just in his prime.

GALATEA. Yes, prime for a mummy in a museum. My God, I've no use for antiques, not even when they're gold lined! Men oughtn't to be allowed after they are twenty. These hang-overs disgust me. [*Sighs.*]

[MADAME PEPITA *lifts the curtain at the door leading to the fitting room, and ushers GALATEA out. For a moment the stage is empty. Then the bell rings, and CARMEN enters with AUGUSTO.*]

[AUGUSTO *is a young man of twenty-five, whose sole preoccupation is the care and adornment of his person. He is dressed in an ultra-fashionable, light colored morning suit, which is slightly effeminate in effect. His shirt, tie, shoes—in short all the articles of his attire—blend in a harmony of delicate hues. He sports a velour hat, whose soft, wide brim, turned up on one side and down on the other, rivals the meticulous lure of the coquette. His blond hair billows above his brow in sweeping waves, one or two of which break gracefully over his forehead. His moustache is equally exquisite, yet, in spite of his preciosity and affected speech, there is something about his person which is undeniably attractive.*]

CARMEN. [*Obsequiously.*] Do step in, Señor Vizconde, and be seated. I will deliver the message.—My God, how sweet that man smells!

AUGUSTO. [*Deigning to accept the proffered chair, but without sitting down.*] Thanks awfully.

CARMEN. Did the Vizconde meet his father, the Conde, on the stairs?

AUGUSTO. Meet my father? No.

CARMEN. [*Seeking a pretext to prolong the conversation.*] The Conde left a moment ago. . . .

AUGUSTO. Did he? Tell Madame Pepita that I am here—that is, if she is disengaged.

CARMEN. Certainly. If the Vizconde has a moment to

spare . . . *Madame* is with a customer, an actress. Perhaps you have heard the name? Galatea.

AUGUSTO. [*Quickly.*] Galatea? When did she arrive?

CARMEN. Half an hour ago, Vizconde. She is selecting models with *Madame*.

AUGUSTO. Let me see her at once.

CARMEN. Galatea?

AUGUSTO. No, Madame Pepita.

CARMEN. Yes, Vizconde.

AUGUSTO. Do not tell her I am here, but say it is urgent. Remember, not one word to Galatea.

CARMEN. No, Vizconde. She will be with you directly.—Holy Mother! What beautiful nails! [*Goes out examining her own.*]

AUGUSTO. [*Smiling fatuously.*] It cannot be helped. Ah, I wonder what they see?

[He looks at himself in the three-panelled mirror, then in the pier glass, then in a hand mirror which lies upon the table, adjusting some detail of his suit, tie or hair at each. Pulling a chain, to which a small bottle of perfume is attached, from his trousers pocket, he pours a few drops upon his handkerchief. Then, he takes a small comb from a case and deftly fluffs the waves of his hair. Then, he twists the ends of his moustache between his thumb and forefinger, makes the circuit of the mirrors again, and, finally, selecting a slender Egyptian cigarette from an incredible case, lights it with a patent lighter before sitting himself down to smoke, seated midway between the two mirrors, from which point of vantage he is able to survey himself upon all sides at once. He is interrupted in this agreeable occupation by MADAME PEPITA, who enters hurriedly, followed by CARMEN.]

MADAME PEPITA. [*To CARMEN.*] But why all this mystery? Will you tell me who wants to see me? What is the matter with you, anyhow?

AUGUSTO. [*Remaining seated, without deigning to remove his eyes from the mirror.*] Pepita, it is I.

MADAME PEPITA. Vizconde!

[AUGUSTO directs a killing glance at CARMEN, who responds with a look of admiration.]

CARMEN. [*As she goes out.*] When he looks at you, it's divine!

AUGUSTO. [*Twirling his moustache complacently, without taking his eyes from the glass.*] Yes, Pepita, it is I. Don't call me Vizconde, call me what you used to when you lived with us.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Ravished.*] Oh, Señorito Augusto!

AUGUSTO. [*Still more condescendingly.*] Or just plain Augusto.

MADAME PEPITA. Señorito Augusto! The very idea!

AUGUSTO. You witnessed my entrance into the world, Pepita.

MADAME PEPITA. How long ago it seems! [*About to cry.*] Your poor mother!

AUGUSTO. [*Abstracted, still preoccupied with himself.*] Yes, my poor mother! Such is life; some die, others are born. Which is which?

MADAME PEPITA. Who knows, Vizconde?

AUGUSTO. No doubt you wonder how it is I come to be up so early?

MADAME PEPITA. The Vizconde knows he is welcome at any hour.

AUGUSTO. It may surprise you, but I have come, my dear, to ask a favor.

MADAME PEPITA. Oh, Vizconde!

AUGUSTO. Pepita, times are hard. Although my habits may be. . . . [*Lowering his eyes.*] The pace today is a trifle rapid. A man of my age with my advantages. . . . [*Gazing at himself from head to foot.*] Well, I must resign myself. [*Smiles.*] Love is expensive. And women have become so dreadfully prosaic. I am madly in love

with a woman—why conceal it? You know her—Galatea?

MADAME PEPITA. Galatea? Who . . . ?

AUGUSTO. Precisely. [*Smiles.*] Who is looking over your models. Hence the need of secrecy: I do not wish her to see me. [*MADAME PEPITA moves over and closes the door.*] Thank you so much. She is a regal creature. [*Turning to admire himself again in an ecstasy of self-satisfaction.*] Although I say it myself, she has exquisite taste.

MADAME PEPITA. Well, she is certainly hard to please.

AUGUSTO. But she is crazy about me. I am sorry for the poor girl. She is in despair over the question of clothes; you know what models are in Madrid. Finally, I said to her: Why not see Madame Pepita?

MADAME PEPITA. Oh, Vizconde!

AUGUSTO. It will be worth your while—and so I dropped in myself. Money is no object in this case. When you make out the bill. . . .

MADAME PEPITA. Oh, Vizconde! Since you are to pay the bill. . . .

AUGUSTO. No, Pepita, no; not exactly. Unfortunately, I shall not pay.

MADAME PEPITA. Eh?

AUGUSTO. I adore her, she adores me, but there are complications. In fact, I suspect that somewhere, in the background, there is some despicable creature who does pay. [*Sighing.*] Some miserable old reprobate—at least so I gather from her maid, Carmelina, an adorable blonde—[*Lowering his eyes*] who conceals nothing from me.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Sincerely alarmed.*] You don't tell me . . . ?

AUGUSTO. Permit yourself a little liberty when you make out the bill—I mean as to price. [*With an endearing pat.*] And we'll split the difference. How is that?

MADAME PEPITA. But, Vizconde—

AUGUSTO. [*Growing more and more affectionate.*] Nonsense. Let the other chap do the worrying. Ah,

Pepita, you are just like my poor, dear mother. [*Becoming sentimental.*] She was fond of you.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Overcome, preparing to cry.*] Yes, your poor mother.

AUGUSTO. But enough of that! Charge her fifteen hundred pesetas.

CATALINA. [*Entering suddenly, without noticing* AUGUSTO.] Mamma, I am going out to the corner to buy some note paper. Gregoria has asked me to write to her young man.

MADAME PEPITA. What on earth is the matter with you? Don't you know how to address a gentleman?

CATALINA. [*Frightened.*] Oh!

MADAME PEPITA. Here is the Vizconde.

CATALINA. Yes . . . I didn't see him first.

MADAME PEPITA. Well, what else have you to say for yourself?

CATALINA. [*Offering her hand to* AUGUSTO, *who takes it gingerly.*] How do you do?

MADAME PEPITA. Say how do you do, Vizconde?

AUGUSTO. [*Condescendingly.*] Oh, never mind!

CATALINA. [*Firmly.*] I'm sure I don't care.

AUGUSTO. [*Insinuatingly.*] Is this . . . original young lady your daughter?

MADAME PEPITA. Yes, Vizconde, my daughter and my punishment.

AUGUSTO. Very well, then we understand each other. You needn't bother to see me out. [*Smiling.*] The girls will be waiting at the door.

[*Retires, accompanied by* MADAME PEPITA, *who returns immediately.*]

CATALINA. [*As he disappears.*] Conceited puppy.

[*She has changed her dress, but is still ungroomed and untidy, as before.*]

MADAME PEPITA. [*Re-entering.*] Are you still here?

CATALINA. [*Intimidated.*] I was looking for my book.

MADAME PEPITA. Haven't I told you a hundred times

not to come in when I have people here, without first dressing yourself properly?

CATALINA. [*Inspecting herself in the mirror.*] But I am dressed properly.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Surveying her from head to foot.*] For what?

CATALINA. [*With sincere conviction.*] I have on a new skirt and a clean waist.

MADAME PEPITA. And then you've taken a turn with them on in the coal bin! Come here! [*Pushing her this way and that, as she fixes her dress.*] Aren't you ashamed to be seventeen and not be able to put your skirt on straight yet?

CATALINA. Ouch! You hurt.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Still pushing her around.*] It will do you good.

CATALINA. Yes, it's fun for you.

GALATEA. [*Outside.*] It's awfully good-looking, of course . . .

MADAME PEPITA. [*Opening the door, which she closed previously.*] Get out! Somebody is coming.

CATALINA. Well, can I go, then?

MADAME PEPITA. Go to the devil, if that will do any good.

[*CATALINA goes out on the left as GALATEA enters on the right. A sewing girl accompanies her, who retires immediately without speaking.*]

GALATEA. [*Sniffing the air.*] Hm! So he has been here?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Pretending not to understand.*] I beg your pardon—

GALATEA. [*Immensely pleased.*] Ha! Ha! Ha! What did he want? I can smell him.

MADAME PEPITA. I have no idea to what you refer, señora.

GALATEA. How innocent we are! I refer to that rascal, Augusto. Nobody could mistake that odor of tube-

rose. [*Deeply gratified.*] It would have surprised me if he hadn't come. Probably he wanted to find out whether or not I was alone. Ha, ha, ha! What did you tell him? Suppose he meets the author of his being on the stairs? Ha, ha, ha! [*Becoming serious.*] Well, I ought not to laugh, I suppose. He's been an angel to me—yes, that's a good joke, isn't it? A real angel. What in heaven's name were we talking about, anyway?

MADAME PEPITA. I hope you found something to suit?

GALATEA. Oh, yes! You have wonderful taste.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Bowing.*] Señora!

GALATEA. There's a blue gown that fairly took my breath away, and a lace negligee, somewhat low . . . do you get me? [*Sighing.*] It was fascinating. Imagine me in it!

MADAME PEPITA. Did you notice a mauve *crêpe de chine* teagown, with a jacket effect of *point d'Alençon*? It would be marvelous with your lines. Try it on, and we can mark the alterations.

GALATEA. No, thanks, I don't believe I'll try on anything to-day.

MADAME PEPITA. You won't?

GALATEA. No, I am not interested. You might make me up two or three batiste blouses, perhaps—don't you know? The cheapest things you have—what you use for chemises will do. And send me a bill for four thousand pesetas.

MADAME PEPITA. Four thousand what?

GALATEA. Half for you and half for me. My God, a woman has to live somehow!

MADAME PEPITA. Oh, the bill? But . . .

GALATEA. While you are about it, I don't suppose you'd mind sending it in duplicate?

MADAME PEPITA. In duplicate?

GALATEA. One for the old man and one for the boy. [*Noticing the horrified look on MADAME PEPITA's face.*] While a woman's young, she's got to provide for her old

age. What are men for, anyway, except to pay bills? There are lots of women who enjoy spending money. Every time they have anything, something else takes their eye, so off they go and buy. [*Very earnestly.*] But that's not my style; I've too much sense. The old man is no good. [MADAME PEPITA *makes a gesture of dissent.*] I am merely taking him as an example—no reflections upon you. Tell me, would you put up with him for a minute if he never came across? Of course not. [*Imitating in pantomime the counting of bills.*] But the young fellow is all right. Besides, what's the use of denying it? I'm mad over him. But what does he expect? I'm not going to be the only one who loosens up. Take that from me.

MADAME PEPITA. If you look at it in that light . . .

GALATEA. Light nothing! Look at it as it is. Suppose now I go in for clothes? Clothes cost money—you know that; and you can't raise a cent on them afterwards to save your neck. A woman's a fool to spend money on clothes. [*Contemptuously.*] Jewels are no better. You have to pay twenty for what you can't sell for ten. Cash is safer, and land. Every penny I save goes into land.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Impressed.*] Then you think well of real estate?

GALATEA. Yes. The next time you run up to Paris, look out of the window as the train leaves Torreldones. You'll see a house on the right, with a fence painted blue.

MADAME PEPITA. With a tin summerhouse in front, with a vine on it?

GALATEA. Lovely, isn't it? That's me.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Enchanted.*] You?

GALATEA. Drop off if you have time and look me over.

MADAME PEPITA. Thanks.

GALATEA. I'm usually there Sundays, watering my lettuce. [*A pause.*] But probably you have more important things to do, and I'm taking your time.

MADAME PEPITA. No, indeed!

GALATEA. Oh, yes, you have! I'll look you up later. Remember—two bills. Don't forget! See you later.

MADAME PEPITA. I shall hope to see you. . . .

GALATEA. I've taken an awful fancy to you—indeed, I have!

MADAME PEPITA. Charmed, to be sure.

[Both go out. After a moment, MADAME PEPITA returns.]

MADAME PEPITA. [To herself.] A thousand pesetas, four thousand pesetas, fifteen hundred, two bills—and all for two batiste blouses! God, at this rate I can dismiss the establishment!

[She goes up to the table and examines the samples that ALBERTO has left. A noise outside. Then, the bell rings and DON GUILLERMO enters, supporting CATALINA, pale and frightened. CRISTINA and another girl follow immediately.]

MADAME PEPITA. [Alarmed, rushing up to her daughter.] What is the matter? What has happened, Catalina?

CATALINA. [Very much frightened.] Nothing, mamma . . . nothing at all.

DON GUILLERMO. Don't be alarmed, señora.

MADAME PEPITA. Sir!

CATALINA. Mamma, this is Don Guillermo.

DON GUILLERMO. The young lady has turned her ankle. Perhaps you had better sit down. [Assisting CATALINA to an armchair.] As she was crossing the street, an automobile almost ran over her. Fortunately, it missed . . .

CATALINA. There wasn't any danger.

DON GUILLERMO. Naturally, she was frightened. Have you a glass of water?

MADAME PEPITA. Squeeze a lime in it.

[CRISTINA goes out.]

DON GUILLERMO. I should suggest an orange.

[*The SEWING GIRL goes out.*]

CATALINA. I'm all right now. I was frightened, that's all.

MADAME PEPITA. Mooning along as usual, were you, with your head in the clouds?

DON GUILLERMO. Don't scold her. Accidents will happen.

CATALINA. [*Insisting.*] Mamma, this is Don Guillermo, the gentleman who lives upstairs.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Brusquely.*] I heard you the first time. [*Affably, to DON GUILLERMO.*] This is a great pleasure. We are much obliged to you.

DON GUILLERMO. Not at all. I was in time to prevent a catastrophe, which somebody else would have prevented had I not been in time.

[*Meanwhile CATALINA has taken his hand, affectionately.*]

MADAME PEPITA. Won't you sit down?—Catalina, let go of the gentleman's hand; it embarrasses him.

[*CATALINA lets go of DON GUILLERMO's hand.*]

DON GUILLERMO. [*Sympathetically.*] No, indeed. She is a little nervous. [*The SEWING GIRL re-enters with a glass of water, which DON GUILLERMO offers to CATALINA.*] Drink this.

SEWING GIRL. We had to put vinegar in it because there wasn't anything sweet in the house.

MADAME PEPITA. That will do.

CATALINA. [*Almost choking, refusing to drink.*] Yes, mamma, because Gregoria finished the orangeade yesterday, when she had that fainting fit, after she had a quarrel with her young man.

MADAME PEPITA. Gregoria a fainting fit? The kitchen cat will be having a nervous breakdown next! [*To the girl.*] Take this away and go back to your work.

[*The SEWING GIRL retires with the glass.*]

CATALINA. [*Aside, to DON GUILLERMO.*] Don't you go away.

MADAME PEPITA. What was that?

CATALINA. [*Timidly.*] I asked Don Guillermo not to go away.

DON GUILLERMO. But I must. However, I live only one flight up. If you need me at any time, Guillermo de Armendáriz is my name.

MADAME PEPITA. My daughter tells me that you are a very learned man.

DON GUILLERMO. [*Unimpressed.*] That depends.

MADAME PEPITA. You are a member of the Academy.

DON GUILLERMO. [*Smiling.*] I could scarcely avoid that.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Astonished.*] Avoid it?

CATALINA. He says it's a great pity that I am such an ignoramus.

DON GUILLERMO. I never said that, because you are not an ignoramus.

MADAME PEPITA. Oh, yes she is! But it's not her fault. It's mine—that is, it isn't mine, either. What could I do? I've spent my whole life working for her like a slave, trying to scrape together enough money so that she wouldn't have to go through what I've been through in this world. Tied down as I am to the worry of these miserable clothes, how was I to tend to her education? That's why she's like this, but you needn't think that it isn't a mortification to me, because when God has given you a daughter—or maybe it was the devil—you just want to have her nonplussed ultra, and it's a great grief to me that she isn't. But why am I telling all this to you, when you don't know what it is to have a child? That is, maybe you do know. Anyhow, it's none of my business. I don't mean to be inquisitive . . .

DON GUILLERMO. [*Smiling.*] No, unfortunately I do not know. I am alone in the world. When I was young, I had no time to marry, and now that I am growing old, it is too late. My books are to blame, and they console me for what I have lost, which is no more than their duty.

Since the subject has been mentioned, I wonder if you would allow me to devote a little of my time to Catalina's education?

MADAME PEPITA. Education?

DON GUILLERMO. It seems providential—we are good friends already. We have talked together, and I am fond of her. She is intelligent.

CATALINA. [*Greatly astonished.*] Am I?

DON GUILLERMO. She will learn quickly; I guarantee it.

MADAME PEPITA. You give her lessons? A member of the Academy?

CATALINA. Certainly, mamma.

DON GUILLERMO. It will be a pleasure. Then, I shall feel that my learning is actually of some use in the world. It has all been rather selfish till now. What do you say? Is it agreed?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Greatly affected.*] Ah, you have no idea how I appreciate this! [*Throwing her arms about CATALINA, and bursting into tears.*] My dear, you are to sit at the feet of an Academician!

DON GUILLERMO. [*Surprised.*] It hardly justifies the emotion. It is not so serious.

MADAME PEPITA. But I feel terribly, because we are dreadfully unhappy. Naturally, you would never suspect it, but since you're so fond of my daughter, I can tell you. Besides, everybody knows it, anyway. We are dreadfully unhappy, right here as we sit, because this poor child has no father. You imagine that I am a widow . . .

DON GUILLERMO. Señora, I imagine nothing of the sort.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Hastily.*] Well, I'm not, I'm married; that is, I am not married either—I mean, yes I am; but it's just the same as if I wasn't because my husband, that is, the man I thought was my husband—

DON GUILLERMO. But you owe me no explanations; I am not concerned in the affair.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Without stopping to draw breath.*]

But I want you to know, so that you won't think . . . You see, it was this way: My parents were good, honest people, my mother was lady's maid and my father butler in the house of the Counts de la Vega de Lezo—you have heard of them?—but I always had a taste for clothes, so I went with some French women to be a dressmaker in Buenos Aires; and when I got there I met the father of this child. I was young and impressionable then. He was a Russian—no doubt about that—and we got married, church and all, but without his settling anything on me, because it isn't done out there, and I thought he was the manager of a printing house; but two months afterwards he turned out to be a duke—yes, sir, a Russian duke, who, because he was the black sheep of the family, had been shipped off to America, and then his father died, and he inherited, and had to go back to his own country. But that wasn't the worst of it. The worst of it was that he was a bigamist.

DON GUILLERMO. A bigamist?

MADAME PEPITA. Yes, he was married already in Russia to a woman of his own rank, and he ran off with her. So when this poor child came into the world, she hadn't any father.

DON GUILLERMO. How singularly unfortunate!

MADAME PEPITA. But I kept right on sewing, and when he got back to Russia, he sent me money, for it is only fair to admit he was always a gentleman, and then I came back to Spain, and established myself in business, and since I've got taste, if I do say it myself, we've gotten ahead. Besides, now and then he sent me money. But it's a long time now since he went away, and I haven't seen him for sixteen years, and my daughter doesn't know him at all, and she never will, for we don't even know whether he is alive or dead, and probably he has other children, anyway; and here I am neither married nor single, and not even a widow! So you see that I have plenty of reason for being unhappy.

DON GUILLERMO. Not so much as you think. You have your health, you have your work, an income, a quiet conscience . . .

MADAME PEPITA. Yes, one thing I can say is that my conscience never troubled me.

DON GUILLERMO. What more do you ask? Love played you a trick. Pshaw! In exchange, you have a daughter, a pledge of happiness, a reason for living. You had your illusion of love for a time, but, believe me, even sadder than to have been deceived, is never to have had the opportunity. Hereafter, you must count me as one of your friends. For the present, I must bid you good-bye. You have my sympathy . . .

MADAME PEPITA. Thanks very much. If I can be of any service—

DON GUILLERMO. Perhaps later. Good-bye.

MADAME PEPITA. *Adiós.*

[DON GUILLERMO goes out. *A pause follows.*]

CARMEN. [*Entering.*] Madame, the salesman has come with the English samples.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Drying her eyes.*] Show him into the other room. I shall attend to his case immediately. [*To CATALINA, who is gazing pensively into space.*] What are you mooning about?

CATALINA. Isn't it sad not to be anybody's daughter, and not to have a father like everybody?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Taking her into her arms.*] You are my daughter.

CATALINA. Oh, mamma, we are dreadfully unhappy!

MADAME PEPITA. We are, my child, we are, indeed! [*Moving off a little, and placing both hands on CATALINA's shoulders, while she looks her straight in the eye.*] But remember this: one thing consoles me for all our misfortunes. In my daughter's veins runs noble blood!

CURTAIN

ACT II

CATALINA and DON GUILLERMO are discovered as the curtain rises. DON GUILLERMO paces up and down with the air of a person feeling himself thoroughly at home, while CATALINA writes at a small table which has been installed near one of the windows to do duty as a desk. It is littered with books and papers, all in hopeless confusion. Presently, CATALINA ceases writing, examining the paper on which she has been working as if looking for mistakes. After conscientious scrutiny, she blots it and lays it upon the table, turning to contemplate her inky fingers with an expression half despairing, half resigned. Upon a second inspection, she becomes even more discouraged, as the ink has not disappeared. Finally, running her fingers nervously through her hair, she rubs them upon her apron, and heaves a profound sigh.

DON GUILLERMO. [*Turning.*] Have you finished?

CATALINA. Yes.

DON GUILLERMO. What are you doing now?

CATALINA. [*Still rubbing her fingers.*] Wiping my fingers. [*Exhibiting her hands.*] I've a little ink on them. [DON GUILLERMO *smiles.*] Writing makes me furious!

DON GUILLERMO. Why?

CATALINA. Because it gets my hands in such a state—it's the pen. I dip it into the ink, and it runs up all over the handle. I use the pen-wiper just as you tell me to, but the more I wipe, the more ink comes off.

DON GUILLERMO. Have patience. It will all come in time. [*Amused.*] The beginning is always difficult. We shall soon see how fast you get on.

CATALINA. [*Discouraged.*] But look at these letters.

The *l*'s are all crooked, and the *m*'s are all pointed. It makes me mad.

DON GUILLERMO. [*Smiling.*] Does it?

CATALINA. Because I know how things ought to be, and, then, I go and do them just the opposite, so, although I know, I don't know, and I get desperate. [*Looking at the paper.*] The *l*'s ought to be straight. Well, I try to make them straight, and they turn out crooked, so what's the use of knowing? Of course, when I'm wrong because I don't know, I'm an idiot, but when I know I'm wrong and then do it, what am I?

DON GUILLERMO. [*Patting her affectionately on the head.*] You are an intelligent young woman, who must work hard in order to overcome the first difficulties, and put what she knows to good use. That is precisely what learning means.

CATALINA. [*After a pause, looking at DON GUILLERMO intently.*] Don Guillermo, what use is learning, anyhow?

DON GUILLERMO. Learning teaches us to know.

CATALINA. Yes, I understand that. But what use is it?

DON GUILLERMO. [*Smiling.*] You will soon see. It is useful in many ways, which, little by little, you will discover yourself. Even if it were of no use, it would still be the most wonderful thing in the world, because it is the only thing that is satisfying in itself. When we have once peeped into the Garden of Knowledge, even at the tiniest gate, it is astounding what marvellous voyages we are able to make, and what sights we can see, without taking the trouble of leaving our chairs.

CATALINA. I suppose that's why you never notice what's on your plate at dinner, and laugh to yourself all the time, and walk out on the street without tying your shoes?

DON GUILLERMO. [*Slightly annoyed.*] What a keen little critic we are!

CATALINA. No, I don't mean anything uncomplimentary, only I can't help noticing what you do, because I

watch you all the time. You mustn't think I'm criticising. Everything you do seems right to me.

DON GUILLERMO. [*Greatly pleased.*] Yes, my dear, I know you are sweet and good, and you are very fond of me.

CATALINA. Yes, I am. [*Artlessly.*] Are you very fond of me?

DON GUILLERMO. Don't you know it?

CATALINA. [*Sincerely pleased.*] Of course I do. I may be stupid about other things, but not about that. I know you are fond of me, because when I broke that jar the other day in the library, you didn't say one word about it, though it was valuable. That's how I know. I didn't mean to.

DON GUILLERMO. You have talent, too, for psychology.

CATALINA. Now you're making fun of me.

DON GUILLERMO. I am very fond of you—fonder than you can imagine, fonder than I could have believed possible myself. I love you better than I do art and science put together.

CATALINA. [*After a brief silence.*] Are we going to begin this all over again?

DON GUILLERMO. No, that will do for today.

CATALINA. I want to tell you a secret. [*Drawing near, mysteriously.*] We're rich.

DON GUILLERMO. Who?

CATALINA. Mother and I. Who did you think? We've inherited a million. My father died and left it in his will. We got word yesterday, and mother has gone to see the lawyer. Nobody knows except Don Luis; he was here last night when word came. Mother says she is going to retire from business, because she's sick and tired of clothes, and we're going to Escorial to live.

DON GUILLERMO. To Escorial?

CATALINA. Yes, mamma owns property there, and she says she's going to build houses and rent them, and keep one, too, for us to live in, that has a big garden with a

grotto, and a fountain in the middle, besides a hot-house where we can grow camelias.

[*The bell rings. CATALINA stops short.*]

Here she comes now.

[*MADAME PEPITA enters, attired in a simple tailor-made suit of grey or dark blue; also a mantilla. She is visibly flustered and out of breath.*]

DON GUILLERMO. Good morning.

MADAME PEPITA. [*About to pass without seeing him.*]
Oh, excuse me! I didn't notice you. Good morning. I'm so excited I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels. Has she told you?

DON GUILLERMO. Yes, indeed.

MADAME PEPITA. Terribly sad, isn't it? And to think of my being caught without a stitch of black to my name! No wonder they say: "Go to the Cutler's house for wooden knives." Here I am fussing about other people's clothes, and I look like a fright myself. I wonder what the notary thought when I walked in in colors on such an occasion?

DON GUILLERMO. Don't worry, probably he never thought at all. Sit down. It is a matter of taste.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Sitting down.*] Oh, dear, no! Whatever's right is right, and for my part, I always want to do the correct thing. Poor dear! Think of his remembering us at such a time!

DON GUILLERMO. He has done no more than his duty.

MADAME PEPITA. But so nicely. [*Bursting into tears.*]
Ah, my dear, your father was always a gentleman! They tell me the poor man was ill for over two years, not able to move out of his chair. And all the while he was thinking of us, and we were sitting here calm and collected as could be, without suspecting the first thing about it. Oh, my daughter! [*Embracing CATALINA, who, as befits the occasion, assumes an expression of supreme anguish.*]

CATALINA. Poor mamma!

DON GUILLERMO. [*Removing CATALINA.*] Come,

come, you must not upset your daughter. It is not right to grieve like this.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Between her sobs, artlessly.*] But I'm not grieving. I feel I can tell you, because you're so wise that you understand anyhow.

DON GUILLERMO. [*Smiling.*] In a measure.

MADAME PEPITA. And that's what makes me feel so badly, not to be able to grieve as I ought. Because you see how the man has behaved to us. And I did care for him, yes, I did! He was the apple of my eye. And when it all happened, seventeen years ago, and he left me forever, believe me, it was all I could do to go on living because of my child, and more than once, yes, more than twice, too, I had a mind to put an end to it all.

CATALINA. [*In tears also.*] Poor mamma!

MADAME PEPITA. And now he's gone and died, and they send me word about it! [*Beginning to cry again.*] Before I can cry the way I feel I ought to cry, I have to stop and try to remember how it was I was able to cry then.

DON GUILLERMO. But there is no obligation whatever upon you to cry. Even if there were, your feelings are beyond your control.

MADAME PEPITA. You are right there.

DON GUILLERMO. To compel ourselves to feel what we do not feel is hypocrisy, a fraud upon ourselves, because it mortifies our pride to realize that our feelings do not measure up to our expectations. If your feelings do not prompt you to cry, you ought not to cry. Tears, unless they are heart-felt, are injurious. They do no good to the deceased.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Exaggeratedly.*] But you don't know how I loved him!

DON GUILLERMO. Certainly I do, but your love has evaporated, like perfume which has stood in a wardrobe for years. Today you have been cleaning house; you find the bottle and it is empty. The contents are gone, they have

been dissipated, they have ceased to be. You have forgotten him, so why worry? Little by little our bodies change, until, after seven years, not one atom of what we once were remains. Remember, he has been absent sixteen years. Not one vestige now remains of the flesh and blood that glowed and quivered with love for him. You are not the same woman, you are a different woman, who has had nothing whatever to do with that man.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Sentimentally.*] But the soul, Don Guillermo? What of the soul?

DON GUILLERMO. The soul may recall vaguely the emotions which the body has felt, but it cannot continue to feel them.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Very positively.*] Well, anyway, it will be safer to go into mourning.

DON GUILLERMO. And very proper, if it affords you any relief.

MADAME PEPITA. No, on account of what people will say. After all, remember I'm inheriting a million.

DON GUILLERMO. Yes, that fact deserves to be taken into consideration.

MADAME PEPITA. [*To CATALINA.*] Dear, run out and tell Carmen to cut you a blouse from the crêpe we're using for the Baroness's tea-gown. I'm too upset to think of anything for myself.

CATALINA. Yes, mamma. Don Guillermo . . .

DON GUILLERMO. I am going also. It is growing late.

CATALINA. Aren't you coming back to dinner?

DON GUILLERMO. I dined here yesterday, and day before yesterday, and Sunday, too, if my memory is correct; and this is only Wednesday.

CATALINA. Pshaw! What of it? He is coming, isn't he, mamma?

MADAME PEPITA. Of course he is. If he isn't here, I always feel as if there must be something wrong with the table.

DON GUILLERMO. Well, since you insist. You have my sympathy, as you know, although I believe you are to be congratulated.

MADAME PEPITA. I appreciate it. [*Greatly downcast.*] We must do the best we can.

CATALINA. [*Going to the door with DON GUILLERMO, and taking his hand as if he were her father.*] Don't forget the meringues you promised.

DON GUILLERMO. I'll bring them along.

[*As DON GUILLERMO and CATALINA go out, the door bell rings, and they come face to face with DON LUIS, who enters. Each gentleman displays plainly his discomfiture at the presence of the other. The CONDE turns his back, affecting indifference, while DON GUILLERMO stares him up and down in disgust, which he does not attempt to conceal. They salute each other, however, the CONDE remaining frigidly polite, while DON GUILLERMO mutters an acknowledgment between his teeth.*]

DON LUIS. Good afternoon, Señor de Armendáriz.

DON GUILLERMO. Good afternoon. [*Biting off the words.*]

[*Goes out with CATALINA.*]

DON LUIS. [*After DON GUILLERMO has disappeared.*] Does this good man spend his entire time here?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Smiling.*] He is giving my daughter lessons.

DON LUIS. Ah! [*Apparently to himself, but with the evident purpose of being overheard.*] Such assiduity makes me suspicious.

MADAME PEPITA. How so?

DON LUIS. [*Significantly.*] We may take that up later. At present, more pressing business demands our attention. Have you had time to rest? Have you recovered from last night? [*MADAME PEPITA nods.*] Have you got the money?

MADAME PEPITA. Yes.

DON LUIS. Where is it?

MADAME PEPITA. Why, as soon as I received it, I deposited it in the bank. The notary went along, because I was afraid to trust myself in the street alone with so much money.

DON LUIS. Have you any of it about you now?

MADAME PEPITA. No. Why do you ask?

DON LUIS. I fear you are making a mistake. It is a matter which involves a will. A demand for money may be made upon you at any time, and I consider it important that you have sufficient on hand.

MADAME PEPITA. I thought so, too, but it seems not. The notary says all the expenses have been paid. My poor dear arranged for everything off there on his estate, so that I shouldn't have a thing to do but accept the money.

DON LUIS. I appreciate your situation. By the way, do you happen to have four hundred pesetas? [*Without allowing her time to recover.*] As a first installment upon a purchase which it is important that you make, a magnificent opportunity—a piece of property next to your own at Escorial, which may be had for a song. A friend of mine is in financial difficulty.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Interested.*] Is the Conde positive that it is a bargain?

DON LUIS. It is a gift! If you miss this opportunity, you will regret it all your life, and you will miss it unless you can let me have four hundred pesetas this very day. What would I give if I had the money!

MADAME PEPITA. [*Producing a brand new check book from her bag.*] Well, I'll sign a check. [*Seating herself at the table, she begins to make out the check.*]

DON LUIS. You certainly are in luck. Money breeds money. While you are about it, you might make it five hundred, so as to provide for emergencies.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Rising, after writing the check.*] Here it is.

DON LUIS. [*Solicitously.*] Allow me to sign the receipt.

MADAME PEPITA. Oh, not at all! Conde, I should be offended.

DON LUIS. [*Convinced.*] As you wish. Now let me offer you a piece of advice. This confidence, which you place in me, deservedly, extend to nobody else. Be on your guard. You are rich, and the world is full of scoundrels. They will cheat you, rob you, they will swarm to your millions as flies to their honey. Pepita, if you are not careful, your generosity will be taken advantage of. I myself have abused it not a little.

MADAME PEPITA. Oh, don't say that, Conde!

DON LUIS. Yes, Pepita, unavoidably, perhaps, but the fact remains that I have abused it. However, Providence is repaying your kindness with interest. You are rich. [*Suddenly overcome.*] God knows I rejoice with you, although this unexpected good fortune obliges me to renounce a dream—It is a subject, however, which as a gentleman, I prefer not to dwell upon.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Interested.*] A dream?

DON LUIS. [*Loftily.*] Alas!

MADAME PEPITA. But to an old friend? Surely the Conde can tell me.

DON LUIS. Yes, after all, why not? Now that it has become impossible, what difference does it make? Catalina and Augusto—you must have noticed how they have become attached to each other?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Surprised and delighted.*] The Vizconde and my daughter?

DON LUIS. Then you have noticed it?

MADAME PEPITA. No, I hadn't noticed.

DON LUIS. Pepita, you are blind. I have suspected for some time, but now I am certain. He has practically confessed, under compulsion, and it is not surprising. Your daughter is an original creature—unusual, fascinating. And

Augusto's temperament is so artistic! It was inevitable.

MADAME PEPITA. But, Conde, pardon me . . . The Vizconde . . . I thought . . . Is he the sort of man?

DON LUIS. My dear, talk; it is all put on. Disappointment will result in irregularities. Men are naturally that way, anyhow. When he realized that he had become the victim of an impossible passion, for I may say that it never occurred to him that I would relent—although you are worthy people, your daughter has no father. We are what we are.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Sobbing.*] Yes, we are.

DON LUIS. However, it is too late now for regrets. When I found myself confronted with a crisis, I was prepared to lay prejudice aside. Adversity has its uses. But you have inherited money.

MADAME PEPITA. Thank God!

DON LUIS. So it is out of the question. You are rich, we are poor. People would think that we were after your money. Never! Never that! Never!

MADAME PEPITA. Why, Conde!

DON LUIS. Never! I could never reconcile myself to such a thing, at least not without a bitter struggle. But my heart aches for my boy. And there is another obstacle.

MADAME PEPITA. Another?

DON LUIS. Which is a great deal more serious. What position does the gentleman on the floor above occupy in this establishment?

MADAME PEPITA. But I have already explained to the Conde that he is giving Catalina lessons.

DON LUIS. But he remains to dinner, he remains to supper, he spends all his time here . . .

MADAME PEPITA. He is devoted to my little girl.

DON LUIS. He is entirely too devoted.

MADAME PEPITA. We are awfully fond of him, Conde.

DON LUIS. That makes it worse.

MADAME PEPITA. He's so gentlemanly and refined.

DON LUIS. No doubt; that is neither here nor there.

The question is not what he is, but what you are. These visits compromise your reputation. Besides, there are too many of them. Remember, you are a young and beautiful woman.

MADAME PEPITA. Yes, I'm thirty-seven.

DON LUIS. With a past—although it was not your fault. With a past! It is another phase which I prefer not to dwell on.

MADAME PEPITA. Conde!

DON LUIS. Your daughter is grown, yet you persist in permitting this gentleman liberties which are extended customarily only to a husband or a father.

MADAME PEPITA. Oh, no! Nothing of the sort. Believe me, there must be some mistake . . .

DON LUIS. Morally, I decline to sanction the situation. I had hoped that our children might unite, but you must realize that a name such as mine is peculiarly sensitive to the breath of slander. I could never tolerate such a dubious situation—not that I wish to criticise your conduct or to dictate in any way. No, do as you see fit. Nevertheless, if this gentleman continues his visits to this house, I shall be obliged to discontinue mine. Interpret it as you may, I shall retire—regretfully, Pepita, but with dignity, I shall retire.

MADAME PEPITA. Conde!

DON LUIS. However, I must hurry to place this money in the hands of my friend. Remember, your interests are first with me. If you need advice, come to me. But as it is, I feel that I intrude. Think it over, think it over very carefully. Do not force me to say good-bye. *Au revoir!* [*Goes out.*]

[MADAME PEPITA, surprised and delighted at the prospect of her daughter's becoming a countess, remains behind completely dazed.]

MADAME PEPITA. My daughter? The Vizconde? Impossible! No, it isn't either . . . Catalina! Catalina!

CATALINA. [*Appearing in the door-way.*] Did you

call, mamma? [*Noticing her mother's agitation.*] Don't you feel well?

MADAME PEPITA. Yes . . . no, I don't. Come here; look at me. How would you like to be a countess?

CATALINA. I, a countess? Why?

MADAME PEPITA. Would you or wouldn't you? Answer me at once!

CATALINA. How can I tell?

MADAME PEPITA. Tell me the truth. Are you in love?

CATALINA. I? In love?

MADAME PEPITA. Isn't there any one you'd like to marry? Are you engaged?

CATALINA. [*Alarmed.*] No, mamma. I'm not engaged.

MADAME PEPITA. But you like some one, don't you? There is some one you're awfully fond of? Don't you find him attractive?

CATALINA. No, mamma . . . not exactly attractive. What are you talking about? Mamma, I don't love anybody.

[*The bell rings, and GALATEA enters like a whirlwind.*]

GALATEA. Where is she? Ah, give me a kiss! Another for luck. A hug, too, this time! [*To Catalina.*] And one for you. [*Embracing mother and daughter in turn.*] Congratulations! You don't know how delighted I was to hear it. Think of it . . . a cold million! What? Pesetas?

MADAME PEPITA. No, francs.

GALATEA. Exchange is at seven and a half. It may not seem much, but when you figure it up . . . [*Considering a moment.*] It comes to fifteen thousand duros. I wish something like that would happen my way. You knew what you were doing, all right, when you married a Russian. Now don't tell me it was love. I've always stuck to the home article, Madrid is good enough for me—although I don't suppose I can teach you anything. Anyway,

I'm tickled to death that you've really got the money, because I don't suppose you'll mind so much now about the bill. I've given up hope of the old man, and his son is no better; they simply haven't got it. Not that I care about the boy . . . I'm silly over him, but the old chap ought to pay somehow. Does he think a man can make an ass of himself at his age for nothing?

MADAME PEPITA. [*To CATALINA, who is displaying keen interest.*] Catalina, see if the girls are ready to try on your blouse.

GALATEA. Yes, run along. Things will be coming your way pretty soon. [*CATALINA retires.*] She's a lucky girl! God remembers her while she's young; she won't have to go through what you and me have. Look out now that some young whippersnapper don't get after her money. The world's pretty rotten, and I don't know whether a woman's worse off when she has money or when she hasn't any, because what's the satisfaction of marrying a man and then sitting around watching him spend your money on somebody else?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Moistening her lips.*] There are all sorts of men.

GALATEA. And then a few. You've said it.

MADAME PEPITA. It strikes me you're a sensible woman. Why don't you break off with the Vizconde?

GALATEA. With Augusto? Never in the world!

MADAME PEPITA. You're not getting anywhere as it is, it seems to me.

GALATEA. I ought to know that better than you do.

MADAME PEPITA. I say!

GALATEA. I wouldn't give him up if I starved. I could lose everything, but I'd love him just the same. I've thought I'd leave him, sometimes, and march myself off to Paris, where a woman can do something. Out of sight, out of mind, don't you know? There's nothing in this for me. But when the time comes, I can't tear myself away.

MADAME PEPITA. It might be a good idea, though.

GALATEA. No, it simply can't be done. I'd feel as if I was committing murder. I love him more all the time, and it's a shame. Last night I started for the station—

MADAME PEPITA. Did you miss the train?

GALATEA. No, he dropped around. Do you know what I've got in this box? Neckties, to make up. Whenever I feel I can't stand him any longer, I just run out and buy him a handsome present. [*Dubiously.*] Well, I suppose somebody's got to do it.

CARMEN. [*Entering.*] *Madame*, the lady in the Calle de Lista wants you to hurry up those negligees. She says she can't wait any longer.

MADAME PEPITA. Yes, better let her have something for tonight; I'd forgotten all about her. Dear me, life is just one emergency after another!

GALATEA. Congratulations again—I am going. I hear you're retiring from business. If you're selling out cheap, tip me off. I know a good thing when I see one. But don't let me detain you . . .

[*MADAME PEPITA retires. GALATEA, after adjusting her hat at the mirror, is about to leave by the other door, when AUGUSTO enters.*]

GALATEA. [*Surprised.*] Augusto!

AUGUSTO. Galatea! Are you here?

GALATEA. I was just congratulating Madame Pepita.

AUGUSTO. What were you doing last night?

GALATEA. I was out. [*Smiling.*]

AUGUSTO. But where were you going? You left no word. I searched all Madrid; I was furious. Don't you love me any more?

GALATEA. [*Smiling.*] Search me.

AUGUSTO. Yes, but how about me?

GALATEA. I didn't get very far.

AUGUSTO. What are you doing tonight?

GALATEA. [*Coyly.*] Is it a date?

AUGUSTO. I must have a moment first with Pepita; I shan't be long. You might wait outside in the motor, and

then we can go for that ring. I know you've set your heart on it—although I had planned it as a surprise.

GALATEA. I have planned a little surprise for you, too.

AUGUSTO. Do you mean it?

GALATEA. [*Handing him the box of neckties.*] Promise not to look.

AUGUSTO. [*About to open the box.*] What can it be?

GALATEA. Wait until you are alone.

AUGUSTO. [*Kissing her hand.*] You're an angel!

GALATEA. So are you. Peep and see. [*Goes out.*]

AUGUSTO. [*After a discreet, but rapid glance in the glass.*] What can it be? [*Opens the box.*] Cravats! [*Becoming sentimental.*] Although her taste may be bizarre, how she loves me! [*Kissing a cravat.*] And how I love her! [*Rising into transports.*]

[MADAME PEPITA enters, greatly pleased to discover AUGUSTO.]

MADAME PEPITA. [*Entering.*] Vizconde! . . . Oh, Vizconde!

AUGUSTO. [*Coming to, hastily bundling up the cravats.*] Pardon me.

MADAME PEPITA. Were you thinking?

AUGUSTO. Thinking? I was trying not to think.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Sympathetically.*] Vizconde!

AUGUSTO. I am in desperate need of seven hundred pesetas. If you cannot let me have them, I shall grow violent. I know you have a million, but I do not ask upon that account. No, I should have had to have them anyway. Life has become insupportable.

MADAME PEPITA. Oh, Vizconde!

AUGUSTO. My heart is broken. What is the good of a heart nowadays? Nobody seems to have one. My heart will be my ruin.

MADAME PEPITA. A tender heart is a priceless treasure.

AUGUSTO. But so expensive! Man cannot exist without woman, woman cannot exist without money.

MADAME PEPITA. Don't let that worry you, Vizconde.

All things come to him who waits, even when it seems impossible. If you are in trouble, come to me. I have the gift of sympathy.

AUGUSTO. So I am coming to you. Can you let me have the seven hundred at once? I am in a hurry, or I should not ask.

MADAME PEPITA. Just a moment, while I write the check.

[MADAME PEPITA retires. AUGUSTO paces back and forth, admiring himself in the mirror. Presently CATALINA enters, approaching the table which contains the papers, without noticing AUGUSTO. They collide with a violent shock while he is still absorbed in the contemplation of his person in the glass.]

CATALINA. Oh! Excuse me.

AUGUSTO. Can't you see where you are going?

CATALINA. Can't you see anything but yourself? Puppy! [Making a face, which he sees in the mirror.]

AUGUSTO. Let me give you a piece of advice, young lady. Don't you make faces at me.

CATALINA. If you weren't so stuck on yourself, you wouldn't have noticed it.

AUGUSTO. It wouldn't do you any harm to be a little stuck on yourself.

CATALINA. Wouldn't it?

AUGUSTO. Do you take out a license for that poodle effect with the hair?

CATALINA. When it rains, don't forget yours is gummed down and glued.

AUGUSTO. Can't you let me alone?

CATALINA. Who are you, anyway? [Seating herself at the table, she opens a drawing book in which she proceeds to copy a map.]

[AUGUSTO stalks up and down without speaking. They exchange glances of mutual contempt from time to time, until the entrance of MADAME PEPITA with

the check. Highly gratified at finding them together, she beams upon them with maternal tenderness.]

MADAME PEPITA. [*Entering.*] The poor dears are embarrassed. What a picture they would make! [*To AUGUSTO.*] The check, Vizconde.

AUGUSTO. Thanks. I shall never forget this—I feel like another man with this money. I may have to go to work to repay you, Pepita; love is a great leveler. Ah, for love's sweet sake! I'm off. . . . [*Rushes out without paying any attention to CATALINA.*]

MADAME PEPITA. [*Deeply affected.*] For love's sweet sake! [*Looking at her daughter.*] Poor Vizconde!

ALBERTO. [*Appearing in the doorway.*] May I come in?

MADAME PEPITA. What is the matter with you?

ALBERTO. No, it's the proprietor, who wishes the samples of English point, and the gold galloons; they're re-required.

MADAME PEPITA. God knows what's become of them by this time.

ALBERTO. We need them to fill an order, just received.

MADAME PEPITA. Very well. Wait, and I'll have them brought, if they can be found. [*Retires, leaving CATALINA with ALBERTO. Both smile, and CATALINA continues her work.*]

ALBERTO. [*Shyly.*] Pleasant day, isn't it?

CATALINA. Yes, very. [*A pause, during which she continues working, while he stands a little way off without removing his eyes from her.*] Won't you sit down?

ALBERTO. Thanks. You are very kind. [*Sits down at the farther end of the room. Another pause.*] Are you sketching?

CATALINA. [*Smiling timidly.*] No, I don't know how to sketch; I'm copying a map.

ALBERTO. [*Unconscious of what he is saying.*] Ah! A map?

CATALINA. It's the map of Europe.

[*Another pause. CATALINA draws busily; then stops and sucks her pencil.*]

ALBERTO. [*Rising.*] Pardon . . . please don't suck your pencil.

CATALINA. Eh?

ALBERTO. It may be impertinent, but it grates upon my nerves.

CATALINA. [*Ready to cry.*] It does look horrid, doesn't it?

ALBERTO. [*Effusively.*] No! You couldn't possibly do anything that looked horrid, because . . . because . . . well, of course not.

[*Another pause. CATALINA draws industriously and breaks the point of the pencil.*]

CATALINA. Oh, dear, I've broken the point!

[*Taking a penknife, she hacks a fearful looking point after great effort; then inspects it with a sigh.*]

ALBERTO. [*Impetuously, rising again.*] Pardon. That is not the way to sharpen a pencil. This is the way. [*Rapidly and easily making a perfect point.*] It's very simple.

CATALINA. [*Admiringly.*] Oh, what a beautiful point! You certainly are a handy man.

ALBERTO. That's my business.

CATALINA. Oh . . . yes! You're an artist. Do you really paint pictures?

ALBERTO. I should like to, but I do not.

CATALINA. Why not?

ALBERTO. I am too poor. My mother is a widow.

CATALINA. [*Interrupting, charmed.*] Just like me!

ALBERTO. [*Without heeding the interruption.*] Only I have six young brothers and sisters. Mother teaches school in a town not far from here, and she says that only rich people can afford to be artists, so she wants me to be a clerk in "La Sultana," as the proprietor is my uncle. She thinks, when he dies, he may leave the shop to me,

since he's a bachelor, and then, naturally we'll all be rich, and we can educate the other children. However, I see no indications . . . but of course that does not interest you.

CATALINA. [*Earnestly.*] Yes, it does; very much.

ALBERTO. I am twenty-two now, and all I do is to carry bundles back and forth to dressmakers and other stupid people who have not the first idea about art. Pardon me . . .

CATALINA. No, you are right. It would be a great deal better to paint pictures.

ALBERTO. [*Enraptured.*] Yes, wonderful pictures, marvellous pictures, such as nobody has ever seen before, palpitating with sunshine and light! Pictures of the sea, the sky—the deep blue Italian sky! Ah, Italy! Rome!

CATALINA. [*Ingenuously.*] Rome is here on the map.

ALBERTO. Rome is in paradise!

CATALINA. Is the sky really so blue there?

ALBERTO. So blue that it is the despair of those who worship her.

CATALINA. Really? I hadn't heard. . . . Funny, isn't it? I've marked the name in blue ink.

ALBERTO. Mark it in gold and precious stones.

CATALINA. Why don't you go if you want to? There's a railroad here, or you can take the boat, across the sea.

ALBERTO. The boat and the railroad cost money, and I have no money.

CATALINA. Oh, don't worry about that. How much do you need?—because we can ask mother for it.

ALBERTO. Mother? No! That would not be right.

CATALINA. Yes, it would. Everybody asks her. Besides, we're rich now. We've inherited a million, and it's in the bank, and all we have to do is sign a paper, and they give us all we want.

ALBERTO. You are kind and generous, but I could never accept it. Thanks just the same; I shall never forget your kindness. I am grateful, really. Could I kiss your hand?

CATALINA. [*Taken aback, hiding her hands.*] Oh, no!

ALBERTO. Why not?

CATALINA. Because . . . because they're all covered with ink.

ALBERTO. [*Seizing her hands.*] What of it? They are lovely, they are dear and sweet, the hands of a generous woman, who understands, who sympathizes.

CATALINA. [*After a pause.*] So you do think you will go to Rome, then, after all?

ALBERTO. Yes, I shall; I have a plan. I work all day, but I study at night. I attend a life class, and when the next competition takes place, I shall enter, I shall win a prize, and then I shall go, no matter what mother says, and when I come back I shall be a great painter. I wish you could see the marvellous pictures I shall paint in Italy.

CATALINA. [*Somewhat anxiously.*] I suppose while you are there you will paint some lovely ladies?

ALBERTO. Oh, naturally!

CATALINA. Like the ones you were telling us about . . . with lines, you know, and proportions?

ALBERTO. When I am famous, I intend to paint your picture.

CATALINA. My picture?

ALBERTO. And win a prize with it. Yes, indeed!

CATALINA. But I . . . I . . . At least mother thinks so . . . [*Looking at herself in the mirror.*] And she's right, too. I haven't any proportions at all. [*Almost reduced to tears.*]

ALBERTO. You haven't?

CATALINA. And I don't know how to dress or fix my hair. [*Crying.*] You can see for yourself.

ALBERTO. [*Greatly troubled.*] No, no, indeed! Not at all! You are . . . yes, you are, señorita . . . Yes, indeed you are . . . [*Choking, almost ready to shed tears himself.*] You, you . . . you have character!

CATALINA. [*Overcome with surprise and delight.*] I have?

[CRISTINA enters with two boxes of samples, without noticing ALBERTO.]

CRISTINA. So you got rid of it, did you?

ALBERTO. [*Moving away from CATALINA.*] It?

CRISTINA. Oh, are you still sticking around? Here are your samples, and you needn't bring any more, because Madame Pepita is retiring from business.

ALBERTO. Thank you so much.

[CRISTINA goes out. ALBERTO is about to resume the conversation, when DON GUILLERMO enters, carrying several packages, one of which, apparently, contains a bottle of champagne. ALBERTO bows and disappears.]

Adiós!

[CATALINA makes no reply.]

DON GUILLERMO. [*Stepping to one side to allow ALBERTO to pass.*] *Adiós!* [*Eyeing him, curiously.*] Here are the meringues. [*Handing the package to CATALINA, who takes it mechanically, and remains standing with it in her hand.*] Who is the young man?

CATALINA. [*Almost choking.*] It's the boy from the silk shop.

[DON GUILLERMO deposits the packages upon the table.]

Don Guillermo, is painting a nice business?

DON GUILLERMO. It is more than a business. It is an art.

CATALINA. But is it nice or isn't it?

DON GUILLERMO. That depends upon how one paints. A good painter has an excellent business.

CATALINA. But a bad painter?

DON GUILLERMO. A bad painter, my dear, cannot exactly be sent to jail, but he belongs there.

CATALINA. [*Alarmed.*] Not really? Is it awfully hard to win the *prix de Rome*?

DON GUILLERMO. It will be in the next competition, as I shall be one of the judges. I am chairman of the jury.

CATALINA. [*Torn between hope and fear.*] You are?

DON GUILLERMO. Yes. Why all this sudden interest in painting?

CATALINA. Don Guillermo, when a painter says that you have character, does that mean that you are pretty or the opposite?

DON GUILLERMO. Neither. It means that you have something characteristic about you, something original, distinguishing you from other people. It means that you are interesting.

CATALINA. But is it a compliment, or isn't it?

DON GUILLERMO. It is the nicest kind of a compliment.

CATALINA. One more question: Does a woman have to be a countess because she's rich?

DON GUILLERMO. [*Alarmed.*] A countess? What makes you ask that?

CATALINA. Nothing, only mother thought perhaps I'd better be one.

DON GUILLERMO. [*Exercised.*] She did? When?

CATALINA. Just now, while you were out, after talking to the Conde.

DON GUILLERMO. Never! There must be some mistake.

CATALINA. Why must there?

DON GUILLERMO. [*Greatly agitated.*] No, you don't have to be a countess. It is absurd, and I shall take care that you don't become one. Never!

CATALINA. What's the difference, anyway? Why fuss so much about it?

DON GUILLERMO. [*Striding up and down, muttering to himself.*] This is too much! Outrageous! I shall make this my business.

CATALINA. [*Timidly and affectionately.*] Why, Don Guillermo? Have I done anything wrong? Are you angry with me? [*Kissing his hand.*]

DON GUILLERMO. No, no. [*With a paternal caress.*]

I was thinking of something else. [*To himself.*] Keep cool! Be calm! [*Aloud.*] This is my business.

CATALINA. [*Affectionately, hesitating what to do.*] Before you settle down, would you like me to bring your cap and slippers?

[MADAME PEPITA enters. *She stops short upon discovering DON GUILLERMO.*]

DON GUILLERMO. [*Pleasantly.*] Well, I am here, you see. Is dinner ready?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Disconcerted; then frigidly.*] Dinner? . . .

DON GUILLERMO. [*Handing her a small package.*] I brought you some nice iced lady-fingers, and a bottle of champagne to enliven the repast. We are fond of them, so we shall enjoy ourselves in love and good fellowship.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Visibly embarrassed.*] Yes . . .

DON GUILLERMO. [*Hands CATALINA the bottle.*] Put this on the ice, too. Oh, by the way, here are some potato chips *à la inglesa*. They are one thing your cook does not do to perfection. [*Handing her another package.*] Crisp them. Mind the bottle . . . [CATALINA goes out. *To MADAME PEPITA, making himself perfectly at home.*] Well, this house has become a vice with me, Doña Pepita. You and Catalina have taken complete possession of my heart. I never cared for a family, but now I could not get along without the illusion of family life which you supply. One of these days you will be removing me from the door with a broom.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Greatly embarrassed, steeling herself with a determined effort.*] Don Guillermo, that is exactly what I wanted to speak to you about.

DON GUILLERMO. [*Surprised.*] Eh?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Scarcely able to articulate.*] Since my daughter has left the room . . .

DON GUILLERMO. [*Becoming serious.*] What do you mean?

MADAME PEPITA. To begin with—now don't be offended, it's not as bad as that. That is, it's unpleasant, of course, especially for me, Don Guillermo, because . . . Well, the fact is you've been very kind to us, and all that, and we can never thank you for what you've done and are doing for my daughter's education. I know it can never be paid for, not to speak of your having taken all this trouble, seeing that she's nobody and you are who you are, and know what you do . . . I don't say so because she's my daughter, but a princess wouldn't be a great deal for you to be giving lessons to . . .

DON GUILLERMO. Yes, but come to the point. What do you mean to say?

MADAME PEPITA. Well, Don Guillermo, circumstances alter, you know, so what used to be . . . It does seem too bad, though, doesn't it? It can't go on forever. You know what I mean.

DON GUILLERMO. I certainly do not. Explain yourself.

MADAME PEPITA. Well, we're just two unprotected women, and everybody's so ready to gossip about what is none of their business, and to make things worse than they are, so people might think . . . Especially since I have a past, I'm sorry to say, which is nobody's business, either. Anyhow, when people were coming to this house because I was a dressmaker, it didn't make so much difference who they came to see, but now that I've retired, it don't look respectable . . . [*Swallowing hard.*] Do you understand me?

DON GUILLERMO. I certainly do—better than I could wish. [*MADAME PEPITA heaves a sigh of relief.*] You think, or somebody thinks for you, that my visits may compromise your reputation, or your daughter's?

MADAME PEPITA. Virgins and martyrs, don't be offended, Don Guillermo!

DON GUILLERMO. What hurts does not give offense.

MADAME PEPITA. But—

DON GUILLERMO. You wish me, then, to confine myself to giving Catalina lessons?

MADAME PEPITA. That won't be so easy, either, I'm afraid, now that we are moving to Escorial to live.

DON GUILLERMO. I have absolutely nothing to detain me in Madrid.

MADAME PEPITA. My daughter is grown, and she will probably marry before long, so, under the circumstances . . .

DON GUILLERMO. Say no more; I understood from the beginning. I merely wished to hear it stated in plain words. You want to get rid of me.

MADAME PEPITA. No, no indeed! We shall always be glad to see you, whenever you have time. Why not run out some Sunday for dinner?

DON GUILLERMO. [*After a pause.*] I see only one drawback to your plan; it won't work.

MADAME PEPITA. It won't?

DON GUILLERMO. [*With dignity and restraint.*] I shall not give up Catalina.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Alarmed.*] Don Guillermo!

DON GUILLERMO. [*Smiling.*] Don't take it so hard. As you say, it sounds worse than it is. [*Deeply moved, but assuming a satiric tone, in order to conceal his emotion.*] I have spent the forty-five years of my life so completely shut off from the world, that I have scarcely become acquainted with myself. Now that I look back, I realize that I have wasted my time. My mother was wrapped up in me, and watched over me until a few years ago, so that I never had occasion for another woman's love. I grew up a selfish old bachelor, salted down in my books. But the strange part of it is, that while I have never cared for women, I have always been fond of children, no matter how ugly or dirty they might be, as they stumbled along. I yearn to take the little dears by the hand, to teach and protect them. Love between men and women is a relation of equals, it may even imply inferiority on the part of the

man. Perhaps I am proud—it is one of my failings; but I have never felt like kneeling before a woman, though I have often had a desire to hold a loving creature in my arms. [DON GUILLERMO, *in reality, has been talking to himself, his eyes fixed upon the floor, but, when he arrives at this point he suddenly becomes aware of the presence of MADAME PEPITA, and turns toward her.*] I beg your pardon . . .

MADAME PEPITA. [*Vastly impressed, but without understanding one word.*] Pardon me.

DON GUILLERMO. Since I have known Catalina, this desire has become concrete. She is everything to me. I could not say whether she is quick or dull; I am not sure whether she is beautiful or plain; I can not even tell you the color of her eyes; but I feel that she is my daughter, much more than she is her father's, yes more, certainly much more than she is yours.

MADAME PEPITA. But it seems to me . . .

DON GUILLERMO. Much more. You brought her into the world, but I have brought a new world to her, fresher, more striking, materially and spiritually, than the old. I have rejuvenated myself so as to bring my mind down to her level. I talk like a child so as to companion with her innocence, and I should gladly forego all the joys of this world and the next, merely for the pleasure of holding her hand while she writes.

MADAME PEPITA. Why, Don Guillermo!

DON GUILLERMO. [*Firmly.*] No, I cannot surrender the child. She requires protection which is absolutely disinterested and sincere. Perhaps you may need it, too. I know what I am doing . . . although you would be entirely within your rights if you put me into the street.

MADAME PEPITA. I shouldn't think of such a thing.

DON GUILLERMO. I should not question your decision. Your point of view is as proper as it is absurd. Legally, I have no right to paternity. My position is extra legal, yet it can be recognized and reduced to legal status; and

the sooner it is done, the better for us all. Don't stare at me—I am not crazy. Desperate diseases demand desperate remedies. The pill is a bitter one, but I shall swallow it. You are a woman of courage yourself.

MADAME PEPITA. What in heaven's name are you talking about?

DON GUILLERMO. I must be accepted in this house as a husband and a father, otherwise I shall not be free to act—I shall be hampered. Why not face the facts? We must marry, and conform to the conventions of society, however inconvenient. I am willing to marry you.

MADAME PEPITA. You?

DON GUILLERMO. [*Visibly worried.*] You, yes and I . . . if you are agreeable.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Speechless with amazement.*] You and I?

DON GUILLERMO. You and I. Pardon my abruptness—you never occurred to me before, I mean, in the light of a wife.

MADAME PEPITA. But you knew that I had been married?

DON GUILLERMO. [*More and more disturbed.*] Be that as it may, this would be a marriage of convenience, pure and simple.

MADAME PEPITA. Pure and simple?

DON GUILLERMO. A moral necessity; love does not enter into it. But we shall be spared embarrassment. You are rich, while I am not poor, which will be sufficient to silence evil tongues, although the opinion of others has no influence with me. I have means to support myself and to permit me to indulge in some pleasures, so money will not be lacking. If you will marry me, I offer to defray the household expenses like a good husband, while you dispose of your million in any way you think convenient. I shall not even take note of its existence. I am a famous man—my name appears in the papers. I have the entrée of the Palace, and a place of honor at

all Court ceremonies, which, naturally, you will share with me. You will be entitled to a reserved seat at the functions of the Academy; the doorkeepers will bow whenever you appear. You will be the distinguished wife of an illustrious author, of an eminent critic, who is one of the glories of his country. Whenever a monument is unveiled or a cornerstone laid, you will be among those who remain for refreshments, and if photographs are taken for *La Ilustración* or *Blanco y Negro* you will be immortalized with me in the group.

MADAME PEPITA. But . . . are you in earnest?

DON GUILLERMO. [*Offended.*] Do I look like a man who would treat marriage as a joke?

MADAME PEPITA. If that is the case . . .

DON GUILLERMO. Your fondest dreams will be realised. One of my ancestors crossed the sea with Hernán Cortés, and undertook the conquest of America. He proved so adept at killing Indians that His Majesty conferred a coat of arms upon him, which I have somewhere under cobwebs at home. You are at liberty to dust it off, since you are partial to nobility, and to display it upon our newspaper, so that people can see who we are.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Deeply affected.*] Don Guillermo!

DON GUILLERMO. And on the door of our automobile too, for we shall have one. We shall get along faster, it is permissible for a man nowadays to blow his own horn. [*Greatly excited, striding to and fro, until, finally, he comes face to face with MADAME PEPITA.*] Well, what is your answer?

MADAME PEPITA. It would be very nice, of course. Protection means so much to a woman, especially when it's a celebrated man. But Catalina . . .

DON GUILLERMO. With due respect to the Slav aristocracy, Catalina will be far better off as the step-daughter of a Spanish gentleman than as the natural daughter of a Russian duke. She will be more marriageable, too, and it is no compliment to myself.

MADAME PEPITA. No, of course not. But . . . I must say you don't seem enthusiastic.

DON GUILLERMO. I know what I am doing, and that is enough. You are not responsible.

MADAME PEPITA. But how do you suppose that I feel?

DON GUILLERMO. My reasons are disinterested, so forgive me; I am anxious, too, to have you satisfied. I am nervous, upset . . . I appreciate what you are. Besides, I am a gentleman, who respects the sex. I do not love you—I shall not pretend that I do—but whatever I have is yours. You will never regret having accepted my name. [*A pause.*] That is, if you do accept it.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Vastly moved.*] Certainly. What else can I do? But I wonder what my daughter will say. I shall never have the courage to face her.

DON GUILLERMO. Leave that to me. [*At the door.*] Catalina! Catalina!

CATALINA. [*Outside.*] I'm coming. [*A pause. DON GUILLERMO and MADAME PEPITA wait, but CATALINA does not appear.*]

MADAME PEPITA. [*Impatiently.*] Catalina, are you coming or are you not?

CATALINA. [*Outside.*] Yes, I'm coming. [*After a moment she enters, not yet quite fastened into a flamingly audacious gown, which scarcely permits her to walk. In the attempt, she entangles herself in the train.*] Did you call?

MADAME PEPITA. But . . . What have you been doing?

CATALINA. Dressing.

MADAME PEPITA. What in the devil's name have you got on?

CATALINA. It's the latest model. I picked it out myself. I'm seventeen now, and I'm no Cinderella any more. I have lines and proportions, and it's time to show my character. [*Looking at herself in the mirror, turning half way round and tripping over her train as she does so.*]

MADAME PEPITA. [*Staring at her, completely stupefied.*] You? In that dress? [*With sudden inspiration.*] Praise God, it's the Vizconde! A miracle of love!

CURTAIN

ACT III

Garden of a country house at Escorial, hopelessly modern and in bad taste. A fountain in the middle contains the familiar group of two children huddled together beneath an umbrella. This masterpiece is zinc, painted to look like marble. The ground is neatly sanded. At the rear, a wall separates the garden from that of the adjoining house. Morning glories cover the wall, vying in luxuriance with a number of fruit bearing vines, while, above the wall, the tops of the trees of the neighboring garden may be seen. The façade of the house is upon the left. The building is an absolutely modern, two-storied structure, boasting a flight of steps, a glass baldaquin, a balustrade decorated with urns which are too large for it, and a crystal ball which hangs from the baldaquin in such a manner as to reflect a view of the garden. Half a dozen wicker chairs are scattered about between the fountain and the house, as well as a small wicker table, on which a sewing basket reposes, also of wicker ware.

The garden extends some distance toward the right, the street gate being a little farther on.

The morning is a bright, sunny one.

When the curtain rises the stage is empty. After a moment, DON LUIS appears above the wall, followed shortly by AUGUSTO. They wear light outing suits and broad-brimmed straw hats, and ascend cautiously by means of a step-ladder from the neighboring garden. DON LUIS carries a sharp-pointed stick in one hand.

DON LUIS. [To AUGUSTO, who has not yet appeared.] Up, my son! You ought to be ashamed of yourself not to be able to climb a wall at twenty-five.

AUGUSTO. [Appearing above the wall, in obvious ill

humor.] I am able, but ascensions among wall flowers do not appeal to me.

DON LUIS. You fail to appreciate the delights of country life. Give me air, fresh air! What a morning for filching one's neighbor's figs! [*Extending the stick toward a fig tree, whose top protrudes between the wall and the house.*] Aha! The biggest one—it's for you. Now, my turn . . .

AUGUSTO. [*Placing the fig on a leaf, which serves as a substitute for a plate.*] Why not ask Pepita for them? She would hand them over already picked. It would be more convenient.

DON LUIS. The pleasures of the chase, my boy. [*Reciting.*]

"Flérída, sweeter far
Than fruits of neighbor's garden are!"

AUGUSTO. [*Impatiently.*] Bah!

DON LUIS. Besides, by removing Pepita's figs, we deprive that literary husband of hers of their enjoyment. He has been eying them for the past week, watching them ripen to sweeten his lunch.

AUGUSTO. You'll lose your balance and topple over.

DON LUIS. Don't worry about me. [*Drawing back a little.*] Some one is coming.

[CATALINA is heard calling in the house.]

CATALINA. Papa! Papa!

AUGUSTO. The daughter! Down quick!

DON LUIS. Never retreat under fire.

[CATALINA enters from the house and crosses the garden. She has discarded short dresses, and now wears a simple, smart morning frock instead.]

CATALINA. [*Looking about.*] Papa! He isn't here.

DON LUIS. Good morning, little rosebud.

CATALINA. [*Startled.*] Eh? [*Looking up at the wall.*] What are you doing up there?

DON LUIS. [*Affably.*] Waiting for you.

CATALINA. Me?

DON LUIS. To tell you how charming you are.

CATALINA. Awfully sweet, I am sure. You almost scared me to death. [*Goes off at the left.*]

AUGUSTO. Ingratiating creature.

DON LUIS. Yes. Wait until you are married.

AUGUSTO. Still harping on that, eh?

DON LUIS. I am more enthusiastic than ever.

AUGUSTO. I could not endure the sight of her, painted and gilded.

DON LUIS. You place your expectations too high. Don't be so deucedly romantic. She is pretty, and will learn to wear clothes, to develop personality. Suppose you don't love her? After all, that is not expected. Marry with your eyes open, like other people.

AUGUSTO. But she can't endure the sight of me, either.

DON LUIS. What of it? You are young and dress well—that ought to satisfy her. You are noble, besides.

AUGUSTO. I have no money.

DON LUIS. After you are married, you will have as much as your wife.

AUGUSTO. That follows, naturally.

DON LUIS. Naturally. My son, we are confronted with a crisis. We have not a penny in the world, and this Academician is insufferable. Pepita may become disillusioned at any moment, and the girl fall in love with another. We subsist as by a miracle. It is absolutely essential that you propose today—sacrifice yourself. What the devil! If I were in your place, if I were twenty-five, I should sacrifice myself with alacrity. [*Losing his balance in his excitement, he is about to tumble into the garden.*]

AUGUSTO. Be careful or you'll fall! Climb down.

DON LUIS. Perhaps it would be best. We are in no position to argue. Lend me a hand . . . Oblige me this time, and take the stick. What do you care? Steady the ladder . . . [*Disappearing.*] Marriage usually steadies a man, anyway.

[*As soon as they are out of sight, CATALINA and DON GUILLERMO are heard upon the left.*]

CATALINA. [*As she becomes audible.*] I searched through the garden for you. How did you manage to slip out?

DON GUILLERMO. [*Smiling.*] Now that you have grown to be a young lady, not to say a coquette, you spend all your time dressing. I could not wait.

CATALINA. Yes, I am a young lady. How do you like my gown?

DON GUILLERMO. Very pretty. You look well in it.

CATALINA. Do you think it's a good thing for a woman to fuss over her looks, or don't you think so?

DON GUILLERMO. If she is clean and healthy, and there is nothing false about her, I see no occasion for her to fuss.

CATALINA. [*Smoothing her hair, uneasily.*] I suppose you're going back to Madrid pretty soon, aren't you?

DON GUILLERMO. Now that the competition is over, there is nothing to take me back. Your protégé will win the prize.

CATALINA. [*Her heart in her throat.*] Honestly?

DON GUILLERMO. Yes, he is certain to be a great painter some day.

CATALINA. Then will he have to go to Rome?

DON GUILLERMO. Assuredly. How are the figs, by the way? I wonder if they are ripe yet. They hang so high that we shall have to climb the tree for them. Get me a basket.

CATALINA. [*Taking a basket from the table.*] Put some leaves in the bottom to make it look nice.

[*They retire behind the corner of the house, under the fig tree. After a brief interval, MADAME PEPITA enters, breathlessly, from the street, hatless, but carrying a parasol. ANDRÉS, a village lad, evidently impressed but lately into the family service, follows.*]

MADAME PEPITA. Ask Paco to help you unpack the crate.

ANDRÉS. Yes, señora.

MADAME PEPITA. Then you can go to the mason's and tell the head man to come here at once. Oh, and be sure you count the bags of lime and the bricks that the workmen bring very carefully, because the number they charge me for is outrageous. The way I am spending money here is something wicked.

ANDRÉS. The Conde says that he don't need any help to count bricks; he says he's managing your property himself, and he don't want me around when he counts the lime, either.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Looking about, indignant and surprised.*] But where are the benches? What have you done with the benches? Didn't you set them out?

ANDRÉS. Just as you said, but as soon as you left we took them away again, because. . . .

MADAME PEPITA. Because what?

ANDRÉS. The gentleman told us to.

MADAME PEPITA. My husband?

ANDRÉS. Your husband.

MADAME PEPITA. Why?

ANDRÉS. Because . . . because he said they were monuments of vulgarity:

MADAME PEPITA. [*With suppressed ire.*] Very well.

ANDRÉS. Is there anything else?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Venting her spleen.*] Only get out of my sight!

ANDRÉS. Excuse me. [*Goes out.*]

MADAME PEPITA. [*Pacing up and down.*] Monuments of vulgarity! Monuments of vulgarity! [*In mingled rage and despair.*]

[DON GUILLERMO enters.]

DON GUILLERMO. Apparently we raise figs for the neighbors. We are conducting a charitable institution. [*Dis-*

covering MADAME PEPITA, and altering his tone.] Hello! I didn't see you.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Sweetly.*] Why? Is anything wrong?

DON GUILLERMO. Yes, our figs are gone. We have lost six—six fat ones, oozing honey.

MADAME PEPITA. The sparrows must have eaten them.

CATALINA. [*Entering behind DON GUILLERMO, deeply dejected.*] No, mamma, it wasn't the sparrows; it was the Conde and his son. I saw them on the wall with a long stick. They said they were looking for me, which I knew, of course, was a lie.

MADAME PEPITA. Of course. They are nothing if not polite. [*Wishing to cut short the conversation.*]

CATALINA. I thought you ought to know, because they are there all the time. Yesterday, they reached through the fence in the garden patch and stole all our raspberries, and they threw a stone into the poultry yard day before yesterday and frightened the chickens, so one flew over the wall into their yard, and they never sent it back, because they ate it, if you want to know what they did with it.

MADAME PEPITA. How perfectly silly! Run in and set the table for lunch as fast as you can. We expect company.

CATALINA. Again? Are they coming to lunch again today?

MADAME PEPITA. Why not? Run in and do as I say.

CATALINA. Yes, mamma. [*Waving to DON GUILLERMO from the top of the steps.*] Wait for me! I won't be long.

DON GUILLERMO. [*Waving back.*] I'll be there before you.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Going up to DON GUILLERMO.*] Don't you like it?

DON GUILLERMO. Certainly.

MADAME PEPITA. Do you mind their coming to lunch?

DON GUILLERMO. This is your house; invite whom you please—you are at liberty to do so.

MADAME PEPITA. I should be sorry if you didn't like it, because I always feel that Don Luis and Augusto are members of the family. However, if you object . . .

DON GUILLERMO. It is a matter of complete indifference to me.

MADAME PEPITA. Don Luis has some important business to talk over. They were coming anyhow.

DON GUILLERMO. Relative to the purchase of the adjoining property from one of his friends?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Slightly embarrassed.*] No, this is about some mines. The Conde felt terribly because that investment turned out the way it did. But this is different. It's a stock transaction. A big company has been formed to take in everybody. If you care to see a plan of the mine . . .

DON GUILLERMO. No, thank you.

MADAME PEPITA. Aren't you interested?

DON GUILLERMO. No. I have no desire to interfere in the management of your estate, nevertheless I advise you to be cautious. Receive this gentleman with the proper warmth, only be careful to confine your expansions to the sentimental sphere, where they are not dangerous. When he and his son install themselves as tenants, rent free, in the very first house that you build, leaving us to stand around and wait for the paint to dry on the second, I say nothing. But don't let your affections run away with your principal. I warn you; you are heading straight for ruin in the arms of your friend.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Sentimentally.*] Everything Don Luis does seems wrong to you.

DON GUILLERMO. If you are going to cry over it, I shall retire. Lose your money and enjoy yourself. I am willing.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Verging toward tears.*] It is awfully hard to please everybody.

DON GUILLERMO. You are under no obligation to please me.

MADAME PEPITA. [*As before.*] But I'm sure I'd like to. [*Sighing.*] That is, if such a thing is possible.

DON GUILLERMO. [*Surprised.*] What is the trouble now?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Assuming a martyred air.*] Nothing. Although . . . We had better talk of something else. [*DON GUILLERMO stares at her.*] You had those benches taken away that I had set out.

DON GUILLERMO. Oh, is that what you have against me? Yes, I did. Pardon my interference in your domestic arrangements, but for once it was too much for me. Artificial stone! Imitation trees! I cannot abide the abominations. They are . . .

MADAME PEPITA. [*Interrupting.*] Monuments of vulgarity! Is that it?

DON GUILLERMO. Worse! They are immoral.

MADAME PEPITA. Immoral? I cannot see how. There were no statues on them. [*Staring at him as if he were crazy.*]

DON GUILLERMO. What is there immoral in a statue? It's the deception of the thing.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Failing to understand.*] Deception?

DON GUILLERMO. Yes, benches which pretend to be stone and make believe to be wood, when they have never even seen a forest or a quarry—they dissemble their true nature, they are impostures. This door, which looks like mahogany when it is miserable pine, these solid marble children who at heart are hollow zinc, these bars and gratings which pass for wrought iron and are the cheapest of calamine—they are impostures, cheats, perpetual lies! In a word, they are immoral. Furthermore, they are ugly.

MADAME PEPITA. But if all our furniture has got to be genuine, it will cost a fortune.

DON GUILLERMO. Then go without; don't counterfeit.

These everlasting frauds, which deceive nobody but ourselves, create an atmosphere of deception. How do I know that a woman who swathes her neck in cat's fur which is dyed to look like sable, will not as easily deceive her husband if she has the opportunity?

MADAME PEPITA. Don't suggest such a thing! Suppose somebody should hear?

[ANDRÉS enters.]

ANDRÉS. Señora, the crate is unpacked. Do you want us to bring it in, or what shall we do with it?

MADAME PEPITA. Yes, bring it here. [ANDRÉS retires. MADAME PEPITA turns to DON GUILLERMO.] I'm so glad it came, just when we were talking about art. You'll like this when you see it.

[ANDRÉS and a second youth enter. Between them, they carry a life-sized figure of a hideous negro, seated in a chair, smoking a cigarette.]

ANDRÉS. Where shall we put it?

MADAME PEPITA. [Ecstatically.] Set it there.

[The boys set the negro carefully upon the ground.]

DON GUILLERMO. [Clasping his head with his hands.] Merciful Powers!

MADAME PEPITA. [Delighted.] Do you like it? [Discouraged.] You don't like that, either! [Sinking into a chair and beginning to cry.]

DON GUILLERMO. But, Pepita! Don't cry, please! It's not worth it, really.

ANDRÉS. Shall we leave it there, Señora?

MADAME PEPITA. I don't know. Anywhere. Throw it down the well!

DON GUILLERMO. No, stand it in the hall. It was intended for the hall, was it not?

MADAME PEPITA. [Through her tears.] Yes, for the hall.

DON GUILLERMO. Put it where it belongs. [The boys mount the steps and stagger into the house.] Don't feel so badly. [Relenting.] It's too awful! If you like it, I am

satisfied; only don't cry. I must go to the city—on business—I may have time yet to run to the station and catch the express. Forgive me . . . Catalina! What has become of Catalina?

CATALINA. [*Appearing at the window.*] Did you call?

DON GUILLERMO. What do you say to a stroll to the station?

CATALINA. I'll be ready in a minute; I've finished the table. Wait under the pine tree.

DON GUILLERMO. Bring your hat along. It's growing pretty hot.

[DON GUILLERMO *withdraws*; CATALINA *waves to him from the window. As soon as he has disappeared, her mother calls her.*]

MADAME PEPITA. Catalina!

CATALINA. Yes, mamma.

MADAME PEPITA. Come here; I want to speak to you.

[CATALINA *leaves the window, descends the steps, and goes up to her mother.*]

CATALINA. What is it?

MADAME PEPITA. Sit down.

CATALINA. What is the matter with you? You're all excited.

MADAME PEPITA. No, my dear; I have been discussing art with your father.

CATALINA. I knew it was something awful.

MADAME PEPITA. Sometimes, my dear, a woman does feel sentimental.

CATALINA. [*Impressed.*] Yes, mamma.

MADAME PEPITA. And, my dear, it is my duty to warn you. We have invited to lunch—

CATALINA. The Conde and his son.

MADAME PEPITA. But I didn't tell you that they're not coming merely for lunch.

CATALINA. Aren't they? What else do they want?

MADAME PEPITA. They, or rather we, expect you and

Augusto to arrive at an understanding. We are anxious to have it settled.

CATALINA. Settled?

MADAME PEPITA. Yes, your engagement.

CATALINA. My engagement?

MADAME PEPITA. Don't be silly. You know what I mean, though you're so coy about it. Augusto—I mean the Vizconde—is willing to marry you. It's an honor.

CATALINA. No!

MADAME PEPITA. Yes. He has consented.

CATALINA. Never!

MADAME PEPITA. Never?

CATALINA. I don't love him.

MADAME PEPITA. How do you know whether you love him or not, when you've never been in love? You will find out after you're married.

CATALINA. I shall never love him.

MADAME PEPITA. I don't see why. He is young and handsome, and dresses well.

CATALINA. He frizzles his moustache with an iron.

MADAME PEPITA. To make it curl.

CATALINA. A man's moustache oughtn't to curl unless it curls naturally. It must be genuine. Truth is more important than anything else in the world.

MADAME PEPITA. You, too!

CATALINA. Yes, me too, mamma.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Rising nervously.*] This a pretty state of affairs. [*Seizing CATALINA and shaking her, greatly incensed.*] Catalina, this is shocking nonsense, the chatter of a silly little parrot! You are going to marry Augusto because it's the best thing you can do. Besides, he's a fine fellow, and he's crazy about you. You'll be a countess, then, which has been the dream of my life. I only wish I was in your place. He is good enough for you, anyway, considering who you are.

CATALINA. I'm my father's daughter—Don Guillermo's daughter, remember that.

MADAME PEPITA. Don't you come that on me.

CATALINA. But, mamma, he loves me and he is kind to me, and I love him. If you insist on my marrying, I'll run and tell him, and he'll protect me, and you'll find out then whether or not I marry.

MADAME PEPITA. You'll marry because I tell you to—and be very careful how you say I will and I won't to me. You silly girl, do you know what you are doing? Making faces at your happiness! I suppose you've got some snip of a prince tucked away up your sleeve?

CATALINA. No, I haven't got any prince there, and you needn't think you can work off any Vizcondes on me, either.

MADAME PEPITA. Wait! You forget you're unmarried. What good is an unmarried woman, anyhow? That's the reason she's unmarried. Your happiness is at stake, and some day you'll thank me for it. A mother's duty is to protect her children.

CATALINA. Yes, and so is father's! I'm going to tell father.

MADAME PEPITA. Oh, let up on father!

CATALINA. Let up on father?

MADAME PEPITA. Yes, your mother is talking now, and your mother comes before everybody else in the world. It would be nice, wouldn't it, if a man who has known you only two or three weeks . . .

CATALINA. I won't have you talk like that about father! [*Beginning to cry.*] You don't love him!

MADAME PEPITA. [*Loftily.*] Whether I love him or not, is none of your business.

[DON LUIS and AUGUSTO *appear at the left.*]

DON LUIS. Do we intrude?

MADAME PEPITA. [*Composing herself.*] Oh, no! Come in! Come right in! [*To CATALINA.*] You stay here with me.

CATALINA. But father?

MADAME PEPITA. To hell with father! Send word out you're engaged.

DON LUIS. We anticipate, perhaps, but I am impatient to conclude that transaction.

MADAME PEPITA. Ah, yes! About the mines?

DON LUIS. Yes. [*Glancing significantly toward AUGUSTO and CATALINA.*] About the mines. We might look over the plans in the house, where it will be more convenient.

MADAME PEPITA. No doubt something of the sort would be best.

DON LUIS. Meanwhile the young people may enjoy themselves in the garden—until luncheon.

MADAME PEPITA. Yes, it will not be ready for a long time.

CATALINA. [*Pulling at her mother's skirts.*] No, mamma.

MADAME PEPITA. Don't be so damm Gothic! [*To the CONDE.*] After you.

DON LUIS. Precede me.

[*They mount the steps and disappear into the house, closing the door behind them. AUGUSTO and CATALINA remain alone. They look at each other, but say nothing. After an interminable silence, AUGUSTO ventures a remark as gracefully as the state of his feelings will allow.*]

AUGUSTO. Would you care to take a little walk?

CATALINA. You don't call it walking, do you, in the garden?

AUGUSTO. I do.

CATALINA. I do not.

AUGUSTO. You do not?

CATALINA. Walking is climbing mountains, and scrambling over rocks, and crashing through the underbrush. I adore walking.

AUGUSTO. I do not.

CATALINA. Oh! Don't you like mountains?

AUGUSTO. When I hunt.

CATALINA. Do you like to hunt?

AUGUSTO. I do.

CATALINA. I do not.

AUGUSTO. You do not?

CATALINA. It's silly for a grown man to spend all day killing poor little animals, who have never done him any harm. It would do you a great deal more good to stay home and read a book.

AUGUSTO. Do you like to read books?

CATALINA. Very much. Do you?

AUGUSTO. I do not.

CATALINA. [*Aggressively.*] Well, what do you like?

AUGUSTO. I like horses and dogs.

CATALINA. Oh, I thinks dogs are disgusting! They jump all over you, and 'upset things, and eat everything there is in the house. Besides, they have fleas. I would rather have a canary; it's pretty and it sings.

AUGUSTO. You don't call that singing—shrilling because it is shut up in a cage? I hate anything that's in a cage. Canaries are in the same class with yellow novels and romantic girls.

CATALINA. [*Delighted.*] Don't you like romantic girls?

AUGUSTO. I don't like any kind of girls.

CATALINA. [*Enchanted.*] You do not?

AUGUSTO. I like women who have spirit and nerve, blood and fire, who know something, and are not ashamed to show it. They may laugh at a man, and have no use for him twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four, but in the one hour that they do, they make him live, or they take his life away. I forgot I was talking to you. . . .

CATALINA. Oh, don't stop on my account. I suppose you mean something superior? Well, I am afraid I'm dreadfully romantic, and I haven't got much fire in my blood—not a bit of it, in fact, although sometimes I do get hot when I think . . .

AUGUSTO. Of a man? Is it some man you already

know, or one you would like to know? Tell me, what sort of man would you like for your husband?

CATALINA. Now, don't be offended. I would like a real man, not as elegant as you are, but one who seems like a man, and who knows something—about art, for instance, and is willing to travel—to Rome, if necessary, and become famous. He might be a painter. I don't care whether he is noble or not; he might belong to the people—no, not to the people, either, but his mother might be a school teacher—

AUGUSTO. [*Seizing both her hands.*] Really? You are an angel!

CATALINA. What?

AUGUSTO. [*Transported.*] An archangel, an extraordinary woman!

CATALINA. [*More and more alarmed.*] Oh! It is true, then. You do want to marry me?

AUGUSTO. No, positively I do not.

CATALINA. Then why do you say all these things?

AUGUSTO. That's it exactly—because I don't want to marry you, because you don't love me, because you love somebody else.

CATALINA. I do not.

AUGUSTO. Yes, you do, though you may not know it. I have no idea who he is—apparently a painter or something of that sort, thank God! Now don't be offended; I don't love you either, although I think better of you than I did, and I am grateful beyond measure. Thank you again, oh, thank you! Thank you! [*Kissing her hands.*]

CATALINA. [*Allowing him to kiss her hands, so completely indifferent that she attaches no importance to it.*] It certainly is a great relief to us both. But wait till mamma hears!

AUGUSTO. [*Distressed.*] And papa!

CATALINA. [*Tapping the ground with one foot.*] She says I ought to take you because you are a vizconde.

AUGUSTO. Yes, and then, you know you are rich. But I'd rather throw in my title for nothing.

CATALINA. And you could have all my money. However, that is impossible.

AUGUSTO. I fear so. What shall we do?

CATALINA. Think of something; you're a man.

AUGUSTO. I? I can't think.

CATALINA. [*Having an inspiration.*] No, we had better ask father. He's not awfully enthusiastic about it, either. Come and find him—or, perhaps, I had better go alone; you can slip out by the orchard gate. Mother and Don Luis will believe, then, that we are still together. How do you like that?

AUGUSTO. Perfect! Hurry and separate and fool them both.

CATALINA. Hurry, while I get my hat. [AUGUSTO runs out behind the house. *As CATALINA reaches the steps, she notices her mother's parasol, which leans against a chair, where it has been forgotten.*] This parasol will do. What's the difference? [*An automobile horn is heard.*] An automobile! [*Distressed.*] Who can it be? [*Hesitating.*] Oh, well! Never mind. [*As she is disappearing, GALATEA enters.*] Oh, Madame Galatea! [*Going up to her pleasantly.*] How do you do?

GALATEA. [*Frigidly.*] How do you do?

CATALINA. [*After looking at her.*] Something is the matter—Mother is inside. Won't you step in?

GALATEA. Thanks. I've business with you, first.

CATALINA. With me? Won't you sit down?

GALATEA. [*Walking nervously to and fro, looking about in all directions.*] I'm easier as I am.

CATALINA. [*Curiously.*] Perhaps you have lost something?

GALATEA. [*Brusquely.*] Yes, and you have picked it up.

CATALINA. I?

GALATEA. My dear, think it over, or all these sweet dreams of yours may turn out to be nightmares.

CATALINA. [*Amazed.*] Nightmares?

GALATEA. Depend upon it, as long as I'm alive, that man is never going to marry anybody but me.

CATALINA. [*Astonished and shocked.*] What man?

GALATEA. So you want me to stage this little scene, do you?

CATALINA. I? What scene? Unless you make it a good deal plainer, I shan't understand one word you say.

GALATEA. You want me to make it plainer, eh?

CATALINA. Yes, make it plainer.

GALATEA. Well, is this plain enough? You think you're going to be a damn countess.

CATALINA. Why, I never heard of such a thing!

GALATEA. What are you doing with Augusto, anyway?

CATALINA. Oh! So it's Augusto, is it? Is that what you're so mad about? Do you want to marry him?

GALATEA. That's my business.

CATALINA. I think so, too. Well, if you love him, and he loves you, go ahead and marry him. Count me out of it.

GALATEA. Don't you love him?

CATALINA. No, and I never did. I can't stand a man who parts his hair with a ruler.

GALATEA. [*Offended.*] Parts it with a ruler?

CATALINA. Yes, that's what he does. And he wears corsets and rouges—although you do yourself, so you've nothing on him there, as far as that goes.

GALATEA. [*Uncertain whether to be pleased or not.*] But there must be some mistake. I thought—I heard that you . . .

CATALINA. Perhaps. I heard it myself, but you can't always believe what you hear.

GALATEA. No, but when you're fond of a man . . .

CATALINA. Are you fond of him, honestly?

GALATEA. I'm fond of him all right.

CATALINA. It is hard for me to believe it.

GALATEA. However, I understand your position. A woman cannot get along without love. She may suffer, she may wish she was dead, and worry until she has not one hair left on the top of her head, but, after all, when you come down to it, love is love. There's nothing else like it.

CATALINA. [*Absorbed.*] I feel as if you might be a great help to me. Have you been engaged very long?

GALATEA. [*Depressed.*] I've never been engaged.

CATALINA. Never engaged?

GALATEA. And it's too late now. I was starving, and needed the money.

CATALINA. Do you really mean you were hungry?

GALATEA. [*Smiling at her innocence.*] Oh, that was a long time ago. But I could starve all my life for that man. You're a lucky girl! Some day you will have a sweetheart yourself, and be engaged. You'll understand, then, what love means.

CATALINA. [*Earnestly.*] I hope I will.

GALATEA. [*Preparing to leave.*] We all go through it. However, there is no need for you to worry.

CATALINA. Are you in a hurry? Won't you wait for Augusto?

GALATEA. No, I guess he's safe with you. But remember! . . . [*Goes out.*]

CATALINA. Don't forget, yourself. [*Puzzled, watching GALATEA as she disappears.*] She's in love. Just imagine it! Ah, before you can be in love, you have to find somebody who is willing!

[ALBERTO enters. *He is dressed as an artist, by which it is to be understood that he wears a flowing tie and broad-brimmed hat.*]

ALBERTO. Good morning. [*Advancing.*]

CATALINA. [*Startled and happy.*] Oh!

ALBERTO. Don't be afraid. [*Disconcerted himself.*]

CATALINA. But . . . I didn't know you were there.

ALBERTO. [*Dreadfully embarrassed, but making an effort to maintain his dignity.*] Yes . . . that is . . . I was in the street, looking for you.

CATALINA. For me?

ALBERTO. [*Apologetically.*] No, not for you—for Don Guillermo. I wish to thank him. Don't you know?

CATALINA. Ah, yes! Of course!

ALBERTO. The gate was open, so . . . But I frightened you?

CATALINA. [*Hesitating.*] Then you did win the prize?

ALBERTO. Yes, thanks to Señor de Armendáriz.

CATALINA. That wasn't the only reason. The picture had to be good, too.

ALBERTO. It wasn't bad, although they said the subject was a little worn out.

CATALINA. Jacob wrestling with the angel.

ALBERTO. Yes, I should never have won the prize on that. The other pictures were good, too—there were two or three good ones; but Don Guillermo preferred mine, because . . .

CATALINA. Because why?

ALBERTO. Because . . . because he thought the angel looked like you.

CATALINA. [*Overcome.*] The angel?

ALBERTO. [*Apologizing.*] Yes, but you mustn't think that I did it on purpose.

CATALINA. [*Disappointed.*] Oh, didn't you?

ALBERTO. No, I just had you in mind. I seemed to see you, that was all. Your head is so characteristic—and your curls, and your wonderful eyes! After I had seen you, and we had talked a little—it came to me as a revelation, just like that.

CATALINA. [*After a pause.*] I suppose you are awfully anxious to go to Rome, aren't you?

ALBERTO. Awfully.

CATALINA. [*After another pause.*] You must be very happy.

ALBERTO. Yes; that is, I should be, very—because I have done what I set out to do. It is my career. Italy is my dream!

CATALINA. [*Sadly.*] I know.

ALBERTO. But, then, I am sorry to go. Honestly, I should rather not. [*Manifestly embarrassed.*]

CATALINA. Why not?

ALBERTO. [*Repenting his indiscretion, before it is too late.*] Because . . . because I am awfully fond of Madrid.

CATALINA. Oh! Are you?

ALBERTO. However . . .

CATALINA. [*Hopefully.*] However?

ALBERTO. However, I am fond of it, and so are you, although you don't live in Madrid any more.

CATALINA. No, I live in the country.

ALBERTO. Yes, in the country!

CATALINA. Are you fond of the country?

ALBERTO. I am fonder of it than I am of Madrid.

CATALINA. Are you? Why?

ALBERTO. Because . . . [*Catching himself.*] There are so many trees in the country.

CATALINA. Are you fond of trees?

ALBERTO. Very—if you are.

CATALINA. [*Touched.*] Oh, yes indeed! [*Restraining herself.*] If you are.

ALBERTO. I am fond of everything that you are, because . . . because you have such excellent taste.

CATALINA. I? What makes you think so?

ALBERTO. Because . . . [*Throwing restraint to the winds.*] Because you have such beautiful eyes!

CATALINA. [*Overwhelmed.*] Have I?

ALBERTO. [*Embarrassed.*] No, excuse me. Yes, you have. They are blue.

CATALINA. Do you like blue eyes?

ALBERTO. Immensely.

CATALINA. [*Coquettishly.*] But my eyes are not blue. That is, they are not entirely blue.

ALBERTO. No, not entirely.

CATALINA. Can you see any green in them?

ALBERTO. Yes, green—decidedly; but it makes no difference to me.

CATALINA. Of course it makes no difference to you.

ALBERTO. [*Fervently.*] Absolutely not.

CATALINA. What do you care what color my eyes are, anyway?

ALBERTO. That is quite different.

CATALINA. Is it?

ALBERTO. Yes. [*Hopelessly embarrassed.*] If you were nothing to me, of course I shouldn't care. Pardon my saying so, but you can never be nothing to me. You could not be indifferent.

CATALINA. Oh! Couldn't I?

ALBERTO. [*Impetuously.*] Never! I must tell you—I know it's not right, but I am very unhappy. You are rich and I am poor—only a poor artist. All I have is my future—a hope of glory, merely a hope, that is all. It is little enough to offer a woman in exchange for happiness.

CATALINA. [*Wishing to appear oracular.*] It may seem little enough to you, but it's an awful lot right now to me.

ALBERTO. No!

CATALINA. Because I have money, you think I must be hard to please, and want the earth, besides. Men always think they know so much, they imagine that they are the only ones who have ideals, or can dream about the future, and things that can never be. Well, let me tell you, women do it, too. Though they may be ignorant, they are just as anxious to go to Rome as men are. [*She begins to cry.*]

ALBERTO. [*Deeply moved.*] Catalina!

CATALINA. [*Without raising her eyes.*] Here am I.

ALBERTO. [*Drawing nearer.*] Catalina!

CATALINA. [*Discovering DON GUILLERMO, who enters.*]
Papa!

DON GUILLERMO. [*Without noticing ALBERTO.*]
Hello! Are you here? I was waiting for you.

CATALINA. [*With a tremendous effort.*] Alberto is here, papa.

DON GUILLERMO. Alberto?

ALBERTO. [*Advancing.*] Alberto Jiménez y Vergara, sir, at your service.

DON GUILLERMO. [*Slightly surprised.*] Ah, yes! I am delighted . . .

ALBERTO. I have come to thank you for . . . for . . .

CATALINA. [*Interrupting.*] For his prize. [DON GUILLERMO makes a deprecatory gesture, indicating that it is not to be mentioned.] And while we are about it, I thought I would tell you that he has asked me to go to Rome with him.

DON GUILLERMO. To Rome? With him? Impossible!

CATALINA. [*Blushing.*] We can get married before we go.

DON GUILLERMO. Outrageous! [*To ALBERTO, angrily.*] I demand an explanation, sir.

CATALINA. It was all my fault.

DON GUILLERMO. Your fault?

CATALINA. Yes, he was poor, so he was afraid to ask me, because I am rich, so I had to ask him. It's the same thing, anyway. I love him, and he loves me.

DON GUILLERMO. This is too preposterous.

CATALINA. And if you won't let us marry, I am going to die, or shut myself up in a convent.

[*While DON GUILLERMO and CATALINA are speaking, DON LUIS and MADAME PEPITA enter from the house. MADAME PEPITA listens in amazement, and turns, unable to restrain her indignation.*]

MADAME PEPITA. [*To CATALINA, seizing her by the arm.*] What is all this nonsense?

DON GUILLERMO. [*Calmly.*] They are in love and want to get married.

CATALINA AND ALBERTO. [*In unison.*] Yes, we want to get married.

MADAME PEPITA. But Augusto?

DON LUIS. Yes, what about Augusto?

CATALINA. [*Heroically.*] He doesn't love me and he is out of it. He is in love with another woman.

MADAME PEPITA. You don't know what you are talking about.

CATALINA. He is in love with Galatea. She's just been here, and she swears Augusto will never marry any one else as long as she is alive.

MADAME PEPITA. Galatea? That shameless hussy?

DON LUIS. Leave her to me. I shall attend to her case.

DON GUILLERMO. [*Interrupting.*] No, it has been attended to already.

DON LUIS. We shall see.

DON GUILLERMO. As long as your activities in this house were confined to checking up lime and bricks, I remained silent; I hesitated to arouse my wife. Now, however . . .

DON LUIS. Do you dare to insinuate . . . ?

DON GUILLERMO. [*Paying no attention to the interruption.*] As I am infinitely more interested in Catalina's happiness than in her mother's bricks, I shall not tolerate any further interference from you.

DON LUIS. Then you imply, sir . . . ?

DON GUILLERMO. That the time has arrived for you to go. Remove yourself! We are not in the habit of discussing family affairs in the presence of strangers. [*Turning his back.* MADAME PEPITA is struck dumb.]

DON LUIS. Very well! I shall retire. What shocking bad taste! Pepita, you will regret this. You will think of me when I am gone and you are pining away, alone

with this man. Remember! You have my sympathy.
[*Goes out.*]

MADAME PEPITA. [*To CATALINA.*] Because Augusto may have made a few slips, is that any reason why I should permit you to—

CATALINA. [*Interrupting.*] Certainly, mamma.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Looking scornfully in ALBERTO'S direction.*] With that man?

CATALINA. Certainly, mamma.

MADAME PEPITA. My daughter, the daughter of a Russian duke, marry a clerk, who is a retailer?

CATALINA. He's an artist.

DON GUILLERMO. In a few years, he will be famous—I guarantee it. He will paint pictures, win medals, and in the course of time be elected to the Academy—[*Sadly.*] perhaps in my place. Some families seem predestined to glory. You will have a great man for your husband, as your mother has had before you.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Sighing.*] All the same, a title would have done no harm, if we could have had it thrown in. I don't want anybody to say I am an unnatural mother.

CATALINA. [*Embracing her.*] Nobody ever accused you of that, mamma.

ALBERTO. We are much obliged to you for what you have done.

MADAME PEPITA. [*Deeply affected.*] Children are a constant source of anxiety.

ALBERTO. But I must not miss my train. I am nervous. If there is nothing I can do . . . Madame Pepita, Don Guillermo . . . I can never thank you sufficiently.

DON GUILLERMO. My wife deserves no thanks.

MADAME PEPITA. God help us both!

ALBERTO. *Adiós*, Catalina.

CATALINA. *Adiós.*

[*They look at each other, too embarrassed to move.*]

ALBERTO. I must be going . . .

